

Review of SSR language in the mandates of UN peace operations

Study Report



About this report

This study report was developed by DCAF – the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance at the request of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), in support of Switzerland's 2023–2024 tenure on the United Nations Security Council. It offers an overview of how security sector reform (SSR) has been reflected in the mandates of UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions over a ten-year period (2012–2022), to provide examples of good practices and opportunities to strengthen the impact of SSR mandates. While this report was prepared to support Switzerland's active engagement on the Security Council, it can contribute to advancing broader reflections on the future of peace operations, forming part of Switzerland's lasting legacy on the Council.

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The views expressed are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the organizations involved in this project, or those of their representatives.

DCAF project team

Vincenza Scherrer, Deputy Head, Policy and Research Division, DCAF
William McDermott, Principal Program Manager, Policy and Research Division, DCAF
Taynja Abdel Baghy, Senior Project Officer, Policy and Research Division, DCAF
Samuel Buol, Junior Project Officer, Policy and Research Division, DCAF

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Executive Summary

The adoption of the Pact for the Future has renewed discussions on the future of peace operations, particularly within a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace.¹ Security sector reform (SSR) is a key element of this effort. **The success of any peace operation hinges on the transformation of the national security sector into one that is not only technically competent but also politically legitimate, accountable, and inclusive.** This transformation is essential for building public trust and ensuring that security sector reforms contribute to lasting peace and stability. To be effective, SSR must be understood not just as a technical stabilization tool but as an integral part of a broader political strategy.

In order to identify avenues for strengthening SSR mandating practice, this report was prepared at the request of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs to support Switzerland's tenure as a 2023–2024 member of the UN Security Council. It is based on a **review of the mandates of all UN peacekeeping and special political missions over a ten-year period (2012–2022)**, and provides: i) a snapshot of how SSR is reflected in mission mandates; ii) an overview of how SSR is linked to the priority tasks of missions; iii) an analysis of the extent to which SSR mandates are aligned to the UN's normative framework on SSR; and iv) an assessment of how SSR mandates pertain to Switzerland's thematic priorities in the context of its Security Council membership.

A review of 166 Security Council resolutions covering 35 missions indicates that **SSR mandates were present in 20 peace operations, distributed evenly between peacekeeping and special political missions.** While SSR is regularly reflected across these missions, the effectiveness of mandates is limited by their tendency to become path dependent. Early in a mission's life, the available political space for SSR is often constrained; however, as the mission evolves, political opportunities arise that should be harnessed by embedding SSR support from the outset with at least a clear directive for political engagement through the good offices of special representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs). While the language of mandates can be difficult to change, small yet significant amendments—such as linking SSR to electoral processes or other critical junctures—can play an important role in enhancing their impact.

When considering the prioritization and sequencing of mandate tasks, it is evident that the integration of SSR is inconsistent. In cases where political processes are prioritized, SSR is explicitly mentioned in only a minority of cases, despite its importance in facilitating power sharing and building trust among political actors. Similarly, although the UN's Protection of Civilians policy acknowledges SSR's importance, few mandates explicitly integrate SSR into their protection strategies, even though transferring protection responsibilities to national security forces is essential to this objective. Moreover, when SSR is linked to the priority task of extension and restoration of state authority, the focus tends to be on capacity building and the physical presence of security actors, often overlooking the need to ensure that these efforts do not undermine the broader political process. A key finding highlights the importance of making SSR-related decisions within mandates with a clear understanding of their potential contribution to the broader political strategy of the mission, ensuring a holistic approach to sustaining peace.

Alignment with the UN's normative framework is crucial for reinforcing the effectiveness of mandates. To strengthen this, it is recommended that country-specific resolutions reference the thematic Security Council resolutions on SSR (2151 from 2014 and 2553 from 2020), linking mandates to key principles such as inclusive ownership, primacy of politics and governance-driven approaches. **Inclusive ownership and national**

¹ United Nations, *The Pact for the Future* (2024), 'Action 21. We will adapt peace operations to better respond to existing challenges and new realities', 22 September 2024, p.17.

capacity-building are central to enabling governments to independently manage and lead their reform processes. However, the review highlights that SSR mandates often delay the integration of capacity-building measures, potentially undermining the development of sustainable and locally led reforms. Missions should prioritize mandates that call for capacity-building efforts that place national actors at the center of coordination, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. This is especially crucial with an eye to transitions, as responsibility should ideally shift to national actors upon mission withdrawal.

While the security sector is central to any transformative political strategy that peace operations support, few SSR mandates emphasized the **primacy of politics**. There was also limited recognition of SRSGs' roles in advancing the broader political objectives of SSR. To address this, SRSGs' good offices should be more systematically leveraged to secure political agreements that enable technical SSR support to proceed. Moreover, building political commitment to long-term **governance-driven reforms** is challenging, yet essential for missions to engage meaningfully in people centered security. To achieve this, mission mandates should explicitly support governance-driven reforms that enhance the effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness of the security sector. However, few SSR mandates have taken a comprehensive approach to good governance, often placing limited emphasis on critical aspects such as strengthening independent oversight, civil society engagement, and effective financial management.

The report also examines how SSR aligns with Switzerland's key **thematic priorities**, highlighting, among other findings, the need for a more comprehensive integration of a gender perspective. Only half of the missions include SSR mandates linked to **gender**, most of which focus on the protection and participation of women. The prevention pillar of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda—which addresses the root causes of insecurity from a gender perspective—remains largely overlooked. The report also highlights missed opportunities to explicitly link SSR to efforts to address underlying drivers of violence as part of **sustaining peace**. Additionally, while elections often pose a risk of violence, and SSR plays a vital role in preventing the security sector from becoming a destabilizing force, SSR support is insufficiently leveraged in preparation for these critical processes.

In conclusion, the report makes a case for reorienting SSR within UN peace operations as both a technical and political instrument which can contribute to advance the political strategy of the mission. It emphasizes that:

- **SSR must be recognized as a core component of any mission's exit strategy, which hinges on the ability of a national security sector to assume its duties.** This requires an early focus on building the foundations for good governance of the security sector in support of a number of priority tasks of peace operations, from stabilisation and RESA to the protection of civilians and support to political processes.
- **SSR must be more clearly understood as a political tool and explicitly reflected as such in mission mandates.** This includes ensuring that mandates outline the role of SRSGs in providing good offices to support political agreements on SSR that align with broader political strategies.
- **A gradual, context-specific approach to mandate adaptation is recommended, one that allows for incremental improvements in SSR language while remaining responsive to evolving local needs and political realities.** This incremental approach should also emphasize proactive thinking about transitions, ensuring that national authorities are empowered early on to lead and manage their SSR processes.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Introduction	5
2. SSR in mission mandates	6
2.1. Analysis of mission mandates.....	6
2.2. Key findings.....	10
3. SSR and the prioritization and sequencing of mandates	12
3.1. Analysis of mission mandates.....	12
3.2. Key findings.....	18
4. How do SSR mandates align with the UN’s normative framework on SSR?20	
4.1. Promoting inclusive national ownership of SSR	21
4.2. Linking SSR to the primacy of politics.....	22
4.3. Adopting a governance-focused approach to SSR.....	24
4.4. Additional objectives of mandated support	27
4.5. Key findings	28
5. How do SSR mandates align with Switzerland’s thematic priorities?	31
5.1. Priorities for Switzerland during its tenure on the Security Council	31
5.1.1. Building Sustainable Peace	31
5.1.2. Protection of Civilians.....	32
5.1.3. Climate Change	32
5.2. Other Swiss priorities.....	33
5.2.1. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and Gender Equality	33
5.2.2. SDGs.....	34
5.2.3. Elections	34
5.2.4. Transitional justice	35
5.3. Key findings.....	36
6. Key Findings and Recommendations	37

1. Introduction

With the adoption of the **Pact for the Future**, momentum is growing to reflect on the future of peace operations within a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace.² Security sector reform (SSR) is critical to peace operations because **a mission's exit strategy depends on the ability of a national security sector to perform its duties effectively, accountably, and inclusively**. Unrepresentative security sectors, shaped by exclusionary politics or their failure to protect populations from violence and human rights abuses, can fuel public grievances and incite violence against the state.³ Conversely, well-functioning security actors are essential to maintaining stability during periods of tension, building trust with and among communities, and protecting people from violence and intimidation. Therefore, investing in the good governance of the security sector is essential for sustaining peace, as recognized in UN Security Council resolutions 2151 (2014) and 2553 (2020).⁴

To learn from SSR mandating practice, Switzerland commissioned DCAF to conduct a policy research study on the **evolution of SSR language in the mandates of UN peace operations**. DCAF undertook a desk-based mapping of Security Council resolution mandates on SSR in the context of peacekeeping missions and special political operations between 2012 and 2022, using the coding software MaxQDA to analyse relevant text.⁵ This resulted in a searchable database of SSR-related excerpts from these mandates, which both shaped the findings presented in this report and informed the briefing notes DCAF shared with Switzerland ahead of mandate negotiations during its two-year tenure on the Security Council.⁶

The methodology underpinning this study had certain limitations. First, it considered only UN mandates, excluding calls for SSR support from national or regional authorities. Second, it examined only activities understood to constitute SSR as defined by the 2008 Report of the UN Secretary-General on SSR (S/2008/39), excluding security sector-related activities (such as equipment provision) that were not linked to broader reform initiatives. Third, it primarily assessed the frequency of mandated activities, rather than their implementation or impact.⁷ Despite these considerations, the report offers a comprehensive overview of how SSR is reflected in UN mission mandates (Section 2), the connection between SSR mandates and priority tasks in missions (Section 3), the alignment of SSR mandates with the UN's normative framework on SSR (Section 4), and the linkage of SSR to Switzerland's thematic priorities (Section 5). The report concludes with a summary of the main findings and recommendations (Section 6).

² United Nations, *The Pact for the Future*, (2024), p.17, "Action 21. We will adapt peace operations to better respond to existing challenges and new realities."

³ United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018).

⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2151, S/RES/2151 (28 April 2014); and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2553, S/RES/2553 (3 December 2020).

⁵ This methodology draws on the approach developed in Vincenza Scherrer and Alba Bescos Pou, *Input to the Review of the UN Defence Sector Reform Policy: Insights from a Mapping of Security Council Mandates and Reports of the Secretary-General (2006–2016)* (Geneva: DCAF, 2020).

⁶ To support Switzerland's tenure on the Security Council, an early draft of this report was shared in 2023, and staff from Switzerland's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York were briefed on key findings and recommendations. Additionally, examples of good practice from the database informed the briefing notes developed by ISSAT/DCAF as part of a separate mandate in support of Switzerland's negotiations at the UN Security Council throughout 2023-2024.

⁷ As a desk-based study, this analysis is focused on the frequency of mandated activities, counting each reference to an SSR activity separately. For instance, if two successive mandates refer to the same activity, each mention is counted individually. This helps mitigate the risk of assigning the same value to a training course lasting a few weeks and the type of long-term activity that recurs in multiple mandates.

2. SSR in mission mandates

2.1. Analysis of mission mandates

From January 2012 to August 2022, the UN Security Council established or periodically renewed over 35 peacekeeping and special political missions in its resolutions. **Of these 35 missions, 20 (10 special political missions and 10 peacekeeping operations) included an SSR mandate**, aimed at supporting the reform of and/or good governance of a security sector (see Table 2.1).⁸ While some divergences in practice are reflected in the mandates for peacekeeping missions versus special political missions, this analysis does not distinguish between these two types of operations.⁹

For the purposes of this study, the **security sector is defined in accordance with the 2008 Report of the UN Secretary-General on SSR**, as comprising: ‘defence, law enforcement, corrections, intelligence services and institutions responsible for border management, customs and civil emergencies’, as well as ‘elements of the judicial sector responsible for the adjudication of cases of alleged criminal conduct and misuse of force’ (discussed here as ‘criminal justice’ actors).¹⁰ Activities aimed at reforming the sector were included in this analysis even if they were not explicitly labelled as SSR.

The following 20 missions were found to have an SSR mandate:

- The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA)
- The United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH)
- The United Nations Office in Burundi (BNUB)
- The United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH)
- The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)
- The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)
- The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)
- The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)
- The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)
- The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)
- The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)
- The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS)
- The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL)
- The United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS)

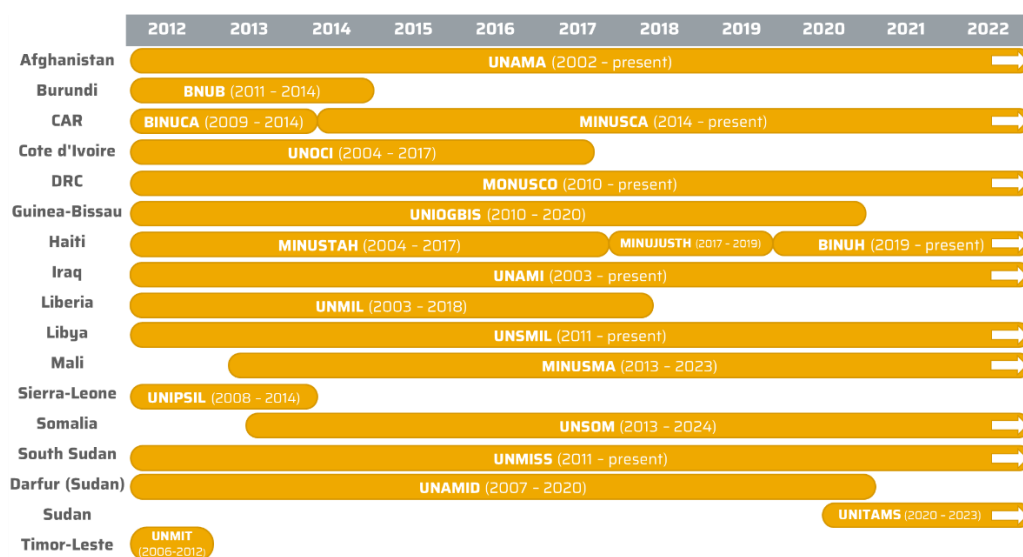
⁸ There were 12 missions and 3 regional offices excluded from analysis due either to the lack of an explicit SSR mandate or of a founding UNSC resolution, in accordance with the research methodology. These 12 missions were: UNSMIS, UNMC, UNMOGIP, UNFICYP, UNDOF, UNIFIL, MINURSO, UNMIK, UNISFA, UNSCOL, UNVMC, and UNMHA. For example, missions such as MINURSO, UNIFIL, and UNFICYP, operating in contexts of long-standing ‘frozen’ conflicts, were excluded from the sample if their mandate did not explicitly include an SSR activity, even if they engaged in SSR support through the implementation of peace agreements in practice. Regional offices like UNOWA/UNOWAS and UNOCA were also not included because their mandates are not renewed by UN Security Council resolutions, despite the fact that they may provide SSR support. The same applies to Offices of Special Envoys (e.g., OSESGY in Yemen), the mandates for which are also not renewed through UN resolutions.

⁹ It is to be expected, for instance, that the mandates of special political missions would leave more room for missions to develop political strategies. Similarly, issues like protection of civilians are more likely to be a priority task in peacekeeping mandates.

¹⁰ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General, Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform*, A/62/659–S/2008/39 (23 January 2008).

- The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)
- The United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS)
- The United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT)
- The United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI)
- The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)
- The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)

Table 2.1. Timeline of missions with SSR mandates, January 2012 - August 2022



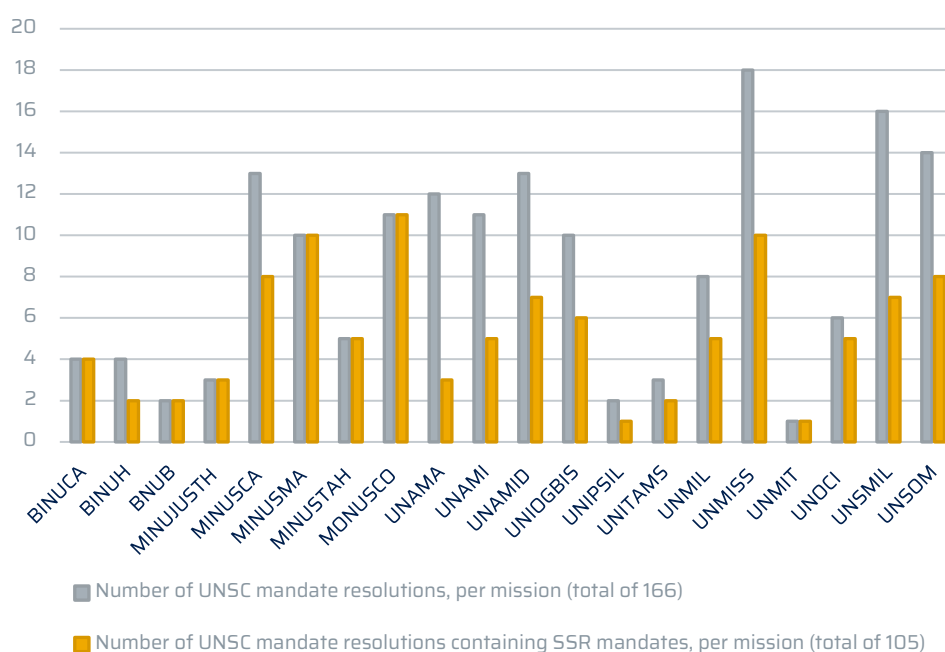
For these 20 missions, a total of 166 UN Security Council resolution mandates were analysed, of which 105 (63%) were found to include SSR-related activities in their operative clauses. Peacekeeping operations were more likely to include SSR-related activities, with 65 out of 88 mandates (74%), compared to special political missions, which included such activities in 40 out of 78 mandates (51%). The difference between the total number of resolutions issued for missions with an SSR mandate and those specifically mandating an SSR activity, as shown in Figure 2.2 (below), is partly due to some missions having SSR mandates for only a limited period (e.g., UNAMA and UNIPSIL).¹¹

Previous research on mandates issued by the Security Council for Defence Sector Reform (DSR) has shown that they are often renewed without updates or modifications.¹² This raises the risk that these **mandates cease to match realities on the ground**, and become unfit for purpose. Similar trends were also observed in the SSR mandates analysed for this study. For instance, almost half of all the mandated SSR activities of MINUSCA were renewed with no or minimal changes to their wording over several years. And in some cases, activities were renewed with only minor amendments for up to eight years in a row, leaving the substance of a mandate unchanged over this timespan even when conditions on the ground were evolving.

¹¹ Additionally, about 12 missions had some mandates renewed without explicitly specifying activities (accounting for approximately 23% of all resolutions assessed), leading to their exclusion from this analysis.

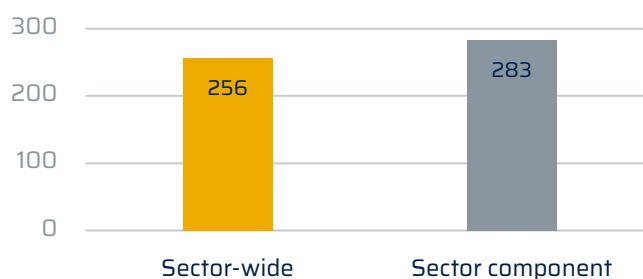
¹² Over the ten-year period reviewed for this study (2006–2016), 71 percent of mandates for DSR support were repeatedly renewed without changes. Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Input to the Review of the UN Defence Sector Reform Policy*, p. 13.

Figure 2.2. Proportion of resolutions containing SSR mandates among total resolutions per mission examined



The SSR activities mandated for these missions are split roughly between **sector-wide initiatives** that aim to enhance the governance and performance of the security sector as a whole, and **component-level initiatives** targeting various security sector institutions (e.g., support to reform of the military or police).¹³ As illustrated by Figure 2.3, 256 sector-wide activities and 283 component-level activities were identified. These classifications can overlap at times, for instance when a component-level mandate incorporates a sector-wide SSR framework.

Figure 2.3. Classification of SSR mandates

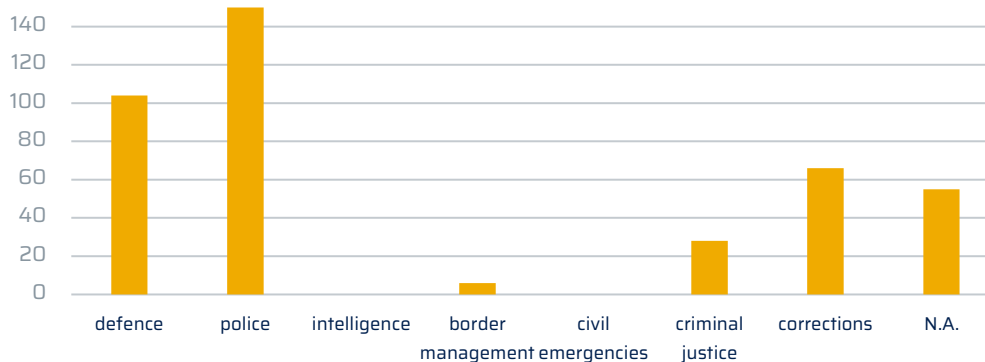


The **component-level activities** mandated in these missions were directed more frequently towards some security sector components than others (see Figure 2.4), with **defence and police targeted over half the time**. Corrections and criminal justice mechanisms were also the focus of a fair number of mandates, but far fewer than defence

¹³ An example of language that denotes a sector-wide mandate is from UNSCR 2121 on BINUCA: 'To support the stabilization of the security situation by advising on security sector governance and reform (SSR).' An example of language calling for a component-level mandate is found in UNSCR 2070 on MINUSTAH: 'strengthen the institutional and operational capacities of the Haitian National Police, in particular by renewed efforts to mentor and train police and corrections personnel'. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2121, S/RES/2121 (10 October 2013).

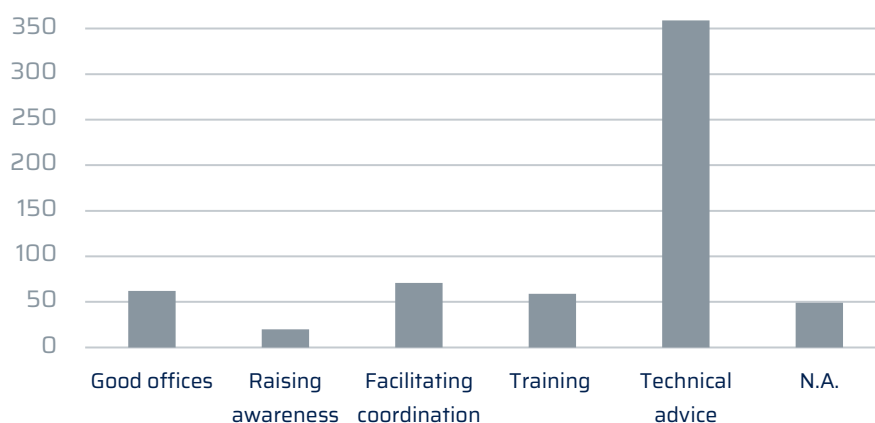
and police.¹⁴ Meanwhile, there were no references to intelligence and civil emergencies components in any of the resolutions analysed for this study, and border management agencies were mentioned just four times. Even so, in practice, it is likely that the UN engages further in all these areas under broader SSR or judicial reform mandates.

Figure 2.4. SSR activities at the component level, per security sector component



For the purposes of this study, SSR activities were categorized into five types: **good offices, awareness raising, coordination, training, and technical advice**. Activities that did not fit into these categories were coded as N.A. (not applicable), as shown in Figure 2.5.¹⁵ Technical advice was mandated more frequently than other types of SSR activities in these missions.¹⁶ In contrast, activities related to training, good offices, and the facilitation of coordination were mandated only intermittently, while awareness raising was mandated very rarely.¹⁷

Figure 2.5. Number of mandated SSR activities, by type



This study identified 10 **types of actors** as potential targets/recipients of UN-mandated support: *governments* (when explicitly listed as such), *ministries of the security sector* (typically the ministries of defence, interior, and/or justice), *security and justice institutions*

¹⁴ In line with the UN Secretary-General's Report on SSR, this study applied a narrow definition of criminal justice, which may have excluded some relevant instances from the criminal justice category. United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General, Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform, A/62/659-S/2008/39* (23 January 2008).

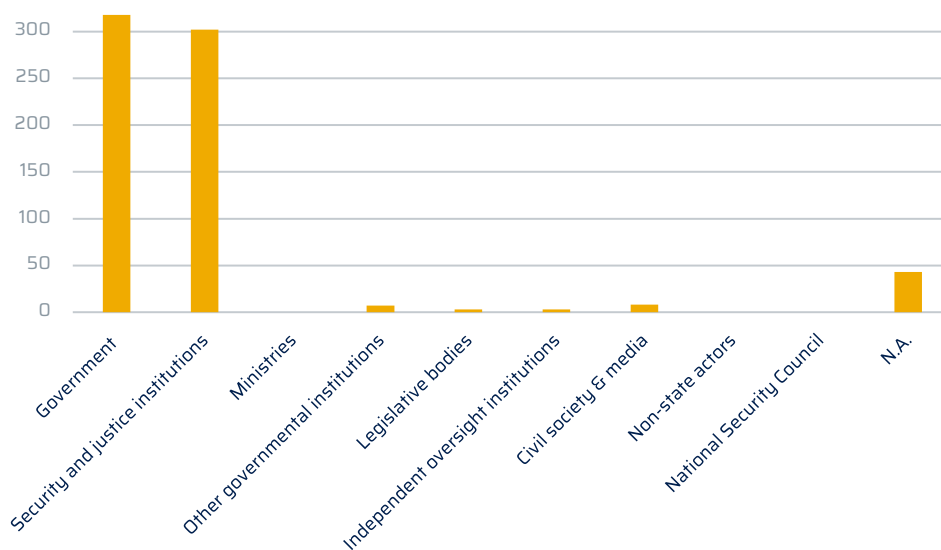
¹⁵ SSR activities mandated in relevant UN Security Council resolutions were assigned to one, several, or none (N.A.) of these categories.

¹⁶ For example, the mandate for MINUSCA calls to 'provide technical assistance to the authorities in developing and implementing a national plan for the integration of eligible demobilized members of armed groups into the security and defence forces, in line with the broader SSR agenda'. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2387, S/RES/2387 (15 November 2017).

¹⁷ Coordination mandates were only counted if they were explicitly focused on SSR.

(such as armed forces, police, prisons, border, intelligence, criminal justice, and the justice sector more broadly), *other governmental institutions* (e.g. ministries of finance or offices of prime ministers), *legislative bodies* (including parliamentary oversight committees for defence and/or security), *independent oversight institutions* (e.g., ombuds and auditors, national human rights institutions, anti-corruption offices), *civil society and media*, *non-state actors in the security and justice sectors* (e.g., customary, traditional, informal justice actors, as well as private security and private military actors), and *national security councils*. When the target of support was not identifiable, the actor was coded as N.A. (not applicable).

Figure 2.6. Number of mandated SSR activities by targeted actor



As Figure 2.6 shows, two types of actors were explicitly mentioned as the beneficiaries of SSR-mandated activities far more than other actors: governments (318), and security and justice institutions (302). **Other actors, including legislative bodies (1), independent oversight institutions (3), civil society (8) and media (0), and non-state actors (0), were almost never cited as targets of SSR support, despite their established roles in security sector governance and reform (SSG/R).**

2.2. Key findings

From this analysis of how SSR has been addressed in UN mandates, one key insight stands out:

- **The path dependency of mandates makes it challenging to reconfigure SSR tasks in line with evolving priorities for sustaining peace.**

The path dependency of mandates presents a significant challenge in reconfiguring SSR tasks to align with evolving priorities for sustaining peace. Mandates, often renewed with minimal changes, tend to become static over time, even as political and security dynamics on the ground shift. This can hinder the UN's ability to recalibrate its efforts in response to critical developments, such as elections or transitions of power. SSR inherently requires flexibility to address shifting priorities. For instance, in one phase, politically sensitive issues like power-sharing may take precedence, while in another, the focus might shift to technical reforms necessary for maintaining security during elections. However, at the outset of a mission, political space for SSR is often constrained right at the time when the mandate is set. Over time, as the political context evolves, new entry points for SSR may

emerge, emphasizing the need for mandates that allow SSR support to adapt and expand accordingly. To address these challenges, mandates should at a minimum include provisions for good offices on SSR, enabling timely political engagement and reform efforts.

While the opportunity to amend mandate language substantially is limited, the Security Council should encourage small, incremental changes that signal strategic shifts at critical political junctures—such as elections or transitions. Ideally, decisions should be informed by strategic assessments that incorporate a focused analysis of security sector-related risks through a prevention lens, ensuring that SSR efforts are fully aligned with broader peace sustainment objectives. This approach highlights the importance of mandates that are both responsive to immediate priorities and adaptable to the evolving political context, ensuring that mandates effectively contribute to peacebuilding in practice.

3. SSR and the prioritization and sequencing of mandates

An important outcome of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) in 2015 was the determination that the prioritization and sequencing of tasks in UN peace operations had to be improved. The resulting ‘HIPPO Report’ described UN missions as overstretched and noted that attempts to accomplish too much at once had led to little being achieved at all. The Report proposed that better prioritization and sequencing of tasks would help ensure the objectives of missions were more realistic and achievable.¹⁸ The Security Council therefore committed to doing more to prioritize and sequence tasks in its mandates; so, while some missions had already done this before 2015, the practice became more common from 2016 onward.

3.1. Analysis of mission mandates

This commitment to prioritize tasks in missions has not been matched by the development of a common or coherent approach to doing so.¹⁹ The mandates for only 3 missions reviewed for this study (MINUSCA, MINUSMA, and MONUSCO) explicitly differentiated ‘priority tasks’ from tasks of comparatively lower priority.²⁰ Other mandates employed a variety of terms to imply a distinction, referring for example to ‘priority mandate areas’ or ‘mandate areas’, and sometimes to ‘priorities’. Meanwhile, some mandates, such as those for BINUH and MINUSTAH, simply do not distinguish any priorities or tasks. The fact that the approach changes year-to-year invites even more inconsistency, as tasks may be delineated in one year and not in the next, or different terminology may be used to describe similar tasks across multiple years.²¹

There has also been little progress in sequencing mandates since the HIPPO Report called for a ‘two-staged sequenced mandating process’ to become ‘regular practice’.²² The objective was to standardize sequencing at the outset of missions and establish benchmarks that could be reassessed at six-month intervals. No peace operations examined in our sample have fully implemented this model; though, this is partly because few new missions have commenced since the Report was issued in 2015.²³ Among the missions assessed in this study, most of which pre-date the HIPPO Report, mandates for only 6 missions include benchmarks drawn from their associated Security Council resolutions. There were also 7 missions that referenced benchmarks in the country-specific reports of the Secretary-General, while 7 missions did not discuss

¹⁸ United Nations, *Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on ‘Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People’* (HIPPO Report), A/70/95–S/2015/446, 16 June 2015, paras 181–186.

¹⁹ As of January 2020, 10 of 17 UN peace operations had instituted some form of prioritization of tasks. Security Council Report, *‘Prioritisation and Sequencing of Council Mandates: Walking the Walk?’*, Research Report No. 1, January 2020.

²⁰ These secondary (lower) priority tasks are designated in a variety of ways. Among others, they are referred to as ‘essential tasks’, ‘additional tasks’, ‘mutually reinforcing tasks’, ‘following tasks’, ‘other tasks’, and in some cases just ‘tasks’ (in opposition to ‘priority tasks’). In mandates for MINUSCA, there is also a tertiary task level, described as ‘additional tasks’ (though, this terminology is used in other mandates to reference secondary-level tasks).

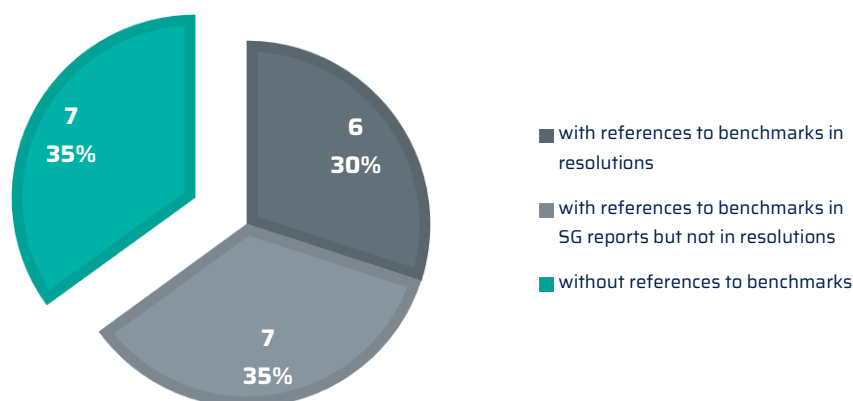
²¹ For example, the last 8 MINUSCA mandates have used 5 different terms to refer to lower priority tasks, and mandates for UNAMID employed one term until 2018 before using a different term in both 2019 and 2020. Mandates for UNSMIL rotated among three terms until 2020, but then made no reference to any priorities or other tasks in 2021 and 2022.

²² United Nations, *Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on ‘Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People’* (HIPPO Report), A/70/95–S/2015/446, 16 June 2015, para. 184.

²³ Security Council Report, *Prioritisation and Sequencing of Council Mandates*, p. 3, 11–12. While this is true of peacekeeping missions, a positive example of sequencing in mandates was seen in the case of two special political missions in Colombia in 2016 and 2017, which incorporated sequenced objectives that were agreed upon in the peace agreement negotiated between the FARC-EP and the government.

benchmarks at all. These findings, shown in Figure 3.1, reveal that calls to improve the sequencing of mandates have not resulted in the application of a consistent approach.

Figure 3.1. Number and proportion of mission mandates in which benchmarks were referenced²⁴



Due to the absence of good practice on sequencing,²⁵ this section will focus primarily on the prioritization of tasks, first offering analysis of SSR as an element embedded within other priorities in mission mandates and then as a standalone priority. **This analysis is restricted to mandates that both designated some prioritization of tasks and organized those priorities (and associated activities) into thematic clusters. Just 8 of the 20 missions assessed in this study fulfilled these two criteria.**²⁶ It is important to note that the term 'priority' is used here to denote any tasks that were prioritized, even if they were not explicitly labelled as 'priority tasks'. Also, while this section examines how SSR aligns with these priority tasks, it may also be referenced elsewhere in the mandate in connection with these thematic issues, even if not directly tied to a priority task.

Table 3.2. Overview of extent to which SSR has figured into common priority tasks²⁷

	BINUCA	MINUSCA	MINUSMA	MONUSCO	UNITAMS	UNMIL	UNMISS	UNOCI	Rate
Stabilization	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	4/5 (90%)
Peace processes	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	4/6 (67%)
POC	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	3/7 (43%)
Protection of Women	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	2/2 (100%)
Protection of Children	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	2/2 (100%)
RESA	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	3/5 (60%)
Justice & Rule of Law	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	4/5 (80%)
DDR	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	2/3 (67%)
Political processes	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	2/5 (40%)

²⁴ Missions with benchmarking references in their resolutions: UNSOM, UNMISS, UNITAMS, UNAMA, and UNAMID; missions with references to benchmarks from SG Reports: BINUH, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, BNUB, MINUJUSTH, UNMIL, UNMIT, and UNOCI; and missions without any reference to benchmarks: MINUSCA, UNAMI, UNSMIL, BINUCA, MINUSTAH, UNIOGBIS, and UNIPSIL.

²⁵ IPI has highlighted several challenges that have hindered efforts to make mandates more fit for purpose, noting that as a result, the extent to which mandates have been prioritized and sequenced varies. IPI, 'Prioritizing, Sequencing, and Streamlining UN Security Council Mandates: Taking Stock of Lessons Learned and Pathways Forward', June 2024, p. 1.

²⁶ These are: BINUCA, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UNITAMS, UNMIL, UNMISS, and UNOCI.

²⁷ This table does not reflect the fact that priorities, and the incorporation of SSR, may not have been consistent in each mission across multiple years. Moreover, thematic priorities may have been either primary or secondary priorities (i.e., higher vs. lower priority tasks).

Priority
Not a priority

SSR reflected within the priority
SSR not reflected within the priority

SSR activities are frequently mandated within priorities such as Protection of Civilians (POC), peace processes, or stabilization, as depicted in Table 3.2. An overview of thematic priorities that have integrated SSR-related activities in more than one mission is offered below.

SSR is consistently linked to stabilization

While there is no common definition of stabilization, it has been proposed, based on mission practice, that it be defined as ‘supporting the transfer of territorial control from spoilers to legitimate authorities’.²⁸ Meeting this objective typically necessitates a combination of: i) *political engagement*, including dialogue with non-state security actors; ii) *use of force*, if political engagement is insufficient; and iii) ensuring the *local delivery of security* after armed groups are removed, to protect civilians and prevent security vacuums. These last two elements require ensuring that security providers are accountable, effective, and legitimate.²⁹ SSR is thus likely to play a contributory role in activities that support stabilization.

Stabilization was a priority in 5 missions reviewed here (BINUCA, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, and UNOCI), and was often combined or merged with other themes in mission mandates. For example, in MINUSMA, stabilization was combined with both Restoration and Extension of State Authority (RESA) and POC; while in MONUSCO, it was combined with SSR, DDR, and POC. With the exception of MINUSCA, all these missions that prioritized stabilization also consistently included SSR activities as a component of this priority, acknowledging the **strong correlation between stabilization and SSR**. These activities often focused on providing support to and building capacity within the security sector.

SSR is frequently linked to peace processes, primarily in relation to the implementation of peace agreements

The 2008 Report of the UN Secretary-General on SSR acknowledges the importance of tackling SSR at the outset of a peace process and notes that a ‘[f]ailure to address the requirements of effective and accountable security can sow the seeds for future conflict’.³⁰ Indeed, integrating SSR into a peace process can improve both the outcome of that process and the sustainability of the peace, and can also lead to more success in implementing reforms.³¹

Peace processes were a priority task in 6 of the 8 missions assessed for this analysis. Of these 6 missions, SSR activities were mandated under this priority in each of the ‘big four’ (MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, and UNMISS). While SSR has been included as a priority task in peace processes, it has typically been framed as a technical measure to support implementation rather than as contributing to the peace process itself. For instance, in MINUSMA, SSR was tasked with supporting the implementation of defence and security measures outlined in the Malian peace agreement, such as assisting in the creation of a comprehensive plan for redeploying the reformed security forces in northern

²⁸ Aditi Gorur, *Defining the Boundaries of UN Stabilization Missions* (Stimson Center, 2016), p. 21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁰ United Nations Report of the Secretary-General, *Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform*, A/62/659-S/2008/39

³¹ United Nations SSR Task Force, *Security Sector Reform: Integrated Technical Guidance Notes* (United Nations, 2012), p. 62.

Mali³². Similarly, in UNMISS, SSR efforts were primarily directed at supporting peace agreement implementation.³³ For MONUSCO, SSR was placed under the broader framework of "implementation of peace agreement and electoral processes," but was mainly focused on its role in elections security.³⁴ Only in MINUSCA was SSR strategically linked to political support, where it played a role in good offices to assist peace processes.³⁵

SSR is only occasionally included under the priority task on protection of civilians (POC)

The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Policy explicitly emphasizes that missions 'engage with the host state security sector on the protection of civilians', and specifies that SSR is directly relevant to all three tiers of action under this priority task.³⁶ Tier I constitutes *protection through dialogue and engagement*, under which the Policy calls on missions to assess security sector governance (SSG) weaknesses that may affect the ability of a state to fulfil its responsibility to protect civilians, and to advocate for the national deployment of security forces for this purpose.³⁷ Tier II, which involves the *physical protection* of civilians, prioritizes activities aimed at enhancing the capacity and accountability of the state to respect international humanitarian law, given the risk that security actors themselves may cause harm to civilians.³⁸ And Tier III, *establishing a protective environment*, encompasses SSR activities such as integrity building, the development of legal and policy frameworks, and enhancing accountability mechanisms and democratic oversight of the security sector.³⁹

In 7 of 8 missions assessed here, the protection of civilians was among the highest (if not *the* highest) mission priority, and SSR activities were incorporated into this priority in 3 of these missions (MONUSCO, UNITMAS, and UNMISS). For the most part, these activities were focused on the reforms required to strengthen respect for human rights and rule of law in the context of protecting civilians, and would fall under Tier III of POC actions. However, some instances of SSR support for POC in these missions could be classified as Tier I actions, including efforts to sensitize or advocate for the security sector to fulfil its mandate and do more to protect civilians, such as through trust building exercises.

SSR is consistently reflected under priority tasks focused on protecting groups that are vulnerable due to discrimination

Within the task of POC, children and women are thought of as sub-categories requiring unique protections in line with their specific needs.⁴⁰ The mandates for 2 of the 8 missions assessed here, MINUSCA and MONUSCO, had already designated POC as a first-tier priority but also placed a special emphasis on considerations related to children and women, particularly in the context of sexual exploitation and abuse; albeit at a lower priority

³² United Nations Security Council Resolution 2480, S/RES/2480 (28 June 2019); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2531, S/RES/2531 (29 June 2020); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2584, S/RES/2584 (29 June 2021); and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2640, S/RES/2640 (29 June 2022).

³³ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2327, S/RES/2327 (16 December 2016).

³⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2348, S/RES/2348 (31 March 2017) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2409, S/RES/2409 (27 March 2018).

³⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2448, S/RES/2448 (13 December 2018); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2499, S/RES/2499 (15 November 2019); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2552, S/RES/2552 (12 November 2020); and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2605, S/RES/2605 (12 November 2021).

³⁶ United Nations Department of Peace Operations, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, Policy Ref. 2023.05.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ The UN's thematic resolution on the Protection of Civilians emphasizes the special protection needs of both children and women. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1265, S/RES/1265 (17 September 1999).

than POC as a whole. SSR activities supporting the protection of women and children often seek to mainstream the specific needs of these groups into wider reform processes, through activities that fall into Tier III of POC actions, meant to enable a wider protective environment.

SSR is sometimes an element of the restoration and extension of state authority (RESA)

RESA is aimed at extending the physical *presence*, building the *capacity*, and cultivating the *legitimacy* of a state.⁴¹ SSR plays an important role in achieving all three of these goals. For example, expanding a state's *physical presence* requires efforts to extend the reach of defence, police, corrections, and criminal justice structures. Research shows that a lack of access to security and justice mechanisms in regions distant from capitals can contribute to the grievances that fuel violence and conflict.⁴² SSR aimed at enhancing good governance is key to building the *capacity* RESA envisions, as it ensures institutions can effectively and efficiently carry out their core functions. *Legitimacy* is about the popular acceptance of a governing authority. While it depends on various factors, the successful and accountable delivery of security is a key determinant.⁴³ Thus, RESA often demands holistic approaches to SSR that acknowledge for instance that police services cannot be extended without functioning courts and prisons to support them.⁴⁴

RESA was prioritized in five of the eight mission mandates reviewed in this analysis (BINUCA, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, and UNOCI). However, the trend across these mandates shows that RESA slightly diminished as a priority over time. Specifically, it was no longer an explicit priority for UNOCI after 2013 and for MONUSCO after 2014, and it was downgraded from a primary to a secondary priority for MINUSCA in 2016. Still, in the cases of MINUSCA, MINUSMA, and MONUSCO, SSR activities have remained embedded in RESA tasks, many of which focus on the role of the security sector in (re)establishing state authority, including through capacity building support.

SSR is often included in justice and rule of law tasks, but these are decreasingly prioritized

The rule of law refers to a 'principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards'.⁴⁵ In 2023, the UN published a 'New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law', underlining that 'rule of law support enables the development of just and equitable societies with strong institutions that protect populations both in conflict and in peacetime'.⁴⁶ This reflects the concept of justice defined in the 2004 Report of the Secretary-General (S/2004/616), as an 'ideal of accountability and fairness in the protection and vindication of rights and the prevention and punishment of wrongs'.⁴⁷ Given that one of the goals of SSR is to strengthen the rule of law, SSR and rule of law tasks are mutually reinforcing. Indeed, an

⁴¹ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, *Presence, Capacity and Legitimacy: Implementing Extension of State Authority Mandates* (United Nations, 2017).

⁴² United Nations and World Bank. *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018.

⁴³ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, *Presence, Capacity and Legitimacy: Implementing Extension of State Authority Mandates* (United Nations, 2017).

⁴⁴ United Nations Department of Peace Operations, *Extension of State Authority in the Areas of Justice and Corrections: A lessons learned study on the work of United Nations peace operations* (United Nations, 2019), p. 22.

⁴⁵ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, *The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies*, S/2004/616 (23 August 2004).

⁴⁶ United Nations, *New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law*, 31 July 2023.

⁴⁷ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, *The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies*, S/2004/616 (23 August 2004).

integrated approach between justice reform tasks and SSR tasks is relevant all along the criminal justice chain, from police reform to prosecutorial and corrections systems reform.

Of the 8 missions assessed here, 5 prioritized justice and rule of law tasks (MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UNITAMS, and UNMIL). However, these tasks are now being de-prioritized across these mission contexts. Once a first-tier priority, the MINUSCA mandate has downgraded justice and rule of law tasks to a second-tier priority; while MINUSMA and MONUSCO de-prioritized them altogether in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Of the missions in which justice and rule of law tasks were ever prioritized, all except MINUSMA frequently incorporated SSR activities, usually aimed at reforming the police and judiciary in order to strengthen the rule of law.

SSR is commonly incorporated into DDR, though this is less frequently a priority task

Both Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and SSR are critical components of post-conflict strategies, aimed at preventing the recurrence of violence and establishing the foundations for sustainable peace and long-term development.⁴⁸ These processes are inherently interconnected as the unsuccessful reintegration of ex-combatants into society through DDR can undermine SSR efforts. Ex-combatants who struggle to transition to civilian life may resort to taking up arms again, posing a threat to fragile security institutions.⁴⁹ While there are multiple points of intersection between SSR and DDR, the most prominent is the integration of ex-combatants into the security sector.

In the mandates analysed, DDR appeared less frequently as a priority compared to other thematic areas. It was prioritized in only three missions (MINUSCA, MONUSCO, and UNOCI), of which two included SSR activities. For instance, in MINUSCA, SSR consistently featured under the priority task of DDR for the period 2015–2021 focusing on the implementation of a national plan for the integration of eligible demobilised members of armed groups into the security and defence forces, in line with the broader SSR process.

SSR is rarely integrated into priority taskings related to political processes

To sustain peace, political consensus must be brokered around sensitive issues that touch on the distribution of power. SSR plays a central role in this process, as it addresses the core of state sovereignty and involves actors with the authority to drastically influence which parts of a population may be protected, overlooked, or even mistreated. SSR also drives broader societal and structural changes, impacting power dynamics and governance. Therefore, for reforms to succeed, SSR must be incorporated within a larger transformative political strategy, with the Secretary-General's good offices leveraged to address SSR as part of political solutions to conflict.

Within the thematic priority of 'political processes', various tasks focused on supporting political processes, such as national dialogue, were identified. These tasks were prioritized in 5 of the 8 missions analysed (MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UNITAMS, and UNOCI). In the mandate for MINUSCA, this priority was framed in conjunction with others, calling for 'support for the reconciliation and stabilization, political processes, the extension of State authority and the preservation of territorial integrity'. Similar language was used in the UNITAMS mandate, which specified the objective to '[a]ssist the political transition, progress towards democratic governance, in the protection and promotion of human rights, and sustainable peace'. The mandates for MONUSCO and UNOCI were more focused, explicitly referred to 'the political situation' and 'political support' as priorities, respectively. Of the five missions, only two—MONUSCO and UNOCI—formally linked SSR to political

⁴⁸ United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, *DDR and Security Sector Reform*, Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, Module 6.10, 14 December 2009.

⁴⁹ Sean McFate, *The Link Between DDR and SSR in Conflict-Affected Countries*, United States Institute of Peace Special Report 238, May 2010.

processes by incorporating SSR activities into this priority task. However, in both cases, these activities were limited to supporting national actors, including the security sector, to prevent violations of international humanitarian law and protect children (MONUSCO) or to assist national authorities in implementing SSR (UNOCI).

SSR rarely figured as a standalone priority

Though SSR was part of a *'combination'* priority in some missions, it appeared as a standalone first-tier priority only in legacy missions such as UNOCI and UNMIL, in mandates from the pre-HIPPO era. However, in combination with RESA, SSR has figured as a first-tier priority in MINUSMA,⁵⁰ and in combination with stabilization, in MONUSCO.⁵¹ As Table 3.3 shows, SSR was also reflected as a standalone second-tier priority in two missions assessed here (MINUSCA and MONUSCO).

Table 3.3. SSR as a standalone priority in missions

	BINUCA	MINUSCA	MINUSMA	MONUSCO	UNITAMS	UNMIL	UNMISS	UNOCI
SSR as a standalone first-tier priority	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (2014–2016)	No	Yes (2013–2015)
SSR as a standalone second-tier priority	N/A*	Yes (2015–2021)	No	Yes (2016–2019)	No	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*

*The N/A label indicates that a mission did not include second-tier priorities.

3.2. Key findings

Some important observations emerge from this analysis as to how SSR was positioned vis-à-vis broader UN mission priorities in the 8 missions that outlined priority tasks:

- **The incorporation of SSR within priority tasks is not aligned to its potential to contribute to the political strategy of the mission.**

While SSR is recognized as vital for peace operations, its application is often too narrowly focused on stabilization, thus overlooking its broader potential as a political tool to advance mission objectives.⁵² This review suggests that while SSR is often reflected under the priority task of 'peace processes', this is typically limited to supporting the implementation of peace agreements rather than actively contributing to the peace process itself. Moreover, SSR is rarely included under priority tasks on 'political processes' that aim to foster national dialogue and reconciliation.

Political transitions, which are often accompanied by heightened tensions and the risk of violence, require robust SSR engagement to ensure security forces remain neutral and support democratic processes. During critical moments, such as elections or constitutional reforms, where political tensions can escalate, SSR can play a pivotal role in ensuring security institutions uphold democratic values, protect civilians, and prevent the abuse of

⁵⁰ MINUSMA's mandate stipulates: 'Support to the re-establishment of State authority throughout the country, the rebuilding of the Malian security sector, the promotion and protection of human rights [...]'. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2164, S/RES/2164 (25 June 2014).

⁵¹ MONUSCO's mandate specifies: 'Support to the stabilization and strengthening of state institutions, including key governance and security reforms.' United Nations Security Council Resolution 2348, S/RES/2348 (31 March 2017).

⁵² For a discussion on how the political approach is contrasted with more militarized approaches, see: Jenna Russo and Ralph Mamiya, *The Primacy of Politics and the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping* (International Peace Institute, 2022), p. 2.

power. In this context, SSR is essential not only to stabilize security but also to safeguard human rights and contribute to broader peacebuilding efforts. Moreover, SSR is crucial to political discussions because it shapes how power is distributed within a state, influencing the balance between state institutions, security forces, and citizens, thereby affecting governance and the legitimacy of political processes. The strategic application of SSR should therefore be broadened to support wider political objectives, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2553.⁵³

- **SSR is only sometimes linked to the priority task of protection of civilians (POC), even though it is vital for ensuring the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of protection efforts.**

The *Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Policy* explicitly highlights the relevance of SSR to all three tiers of POC action, including (1) protection through dialogue and engagement, (2) physical protection of civilians, and (3) establishing a protective environment (see the sub-section above on POC).⁵⁴ However, in practice, only 3 of the 7 POC priority tasks reviewed for this study explicitly included SSR, despite its critical role in long-term protection strategies that underpin a mission's exit strategy.

The logic of SSR is that, rather than the UN assuming responsibility for civilian protection, this duty must be transferred to national actors to enable the mission's drawdown. Even in contexts where the national security sector poses a significant threat to civilians, the mission's exit remains contingent on the handover of protection to that very sector. However, this transition is far from straightforward, particularly in contexts where the national security sector lacks accountability. The Policy on POC highlights that training and equipping security forces alone is insufficient without robust accountability mechanisms to address misconduct and prevent harm.⁵⁵ For a mission's exit to be sustainable, the security sector must be equipped not only with capacity but also with legitimacy and trust from the population. To achieve this, the Security Council should integrate mandates that prioritize building accountability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness in national security sectors from the earliest stages of mission planning, positioning these efforts as a fundamental contribution to the priority task of POC.

- **When SSR is linked to RESA, mandates frequently fail to adequately emphasize accountability and inclusiveness, often overlooking the broader political context essential for long-term success.**

While RESA may be seen as a technical exercise necessary for stabilization, it is also a highly political task in contexts where the absence of state legitimacy is a driver of violence and conflict. When a mandate includes both the priority tasks of supporting a political process and of RESA, it is good practice to ensure SSR is adequately linked to both. This review found that only the most recent MINUSCA mandates recognized that support to the deployment of armed forces should take place with 'the guarantee that it does not constitute a risk to the stabilization of the country, civilians or the political process'.⁵⁶ More broadly, SSR mandates under RESA should prioritize accountability and legitimacy to counterbalance potential risks. Yet, this review found that some RESA mandates on SSR are still overly focused on deploying a presence and building capacity, with insufficient attention to ensuring accountability to balance these efforts.

⁵³ Resolution 2553 calls for SRSGs to consider in their good offices 'the role of security sector reform in mission efforts to advance peace processes, extend state authority and strengthen a protective environment for civilians'. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2553, S/RES/2553 (3 December 2020).

⁵⁴ United Nations Department of Peace Operations, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, Policy Ref. 2023.05.

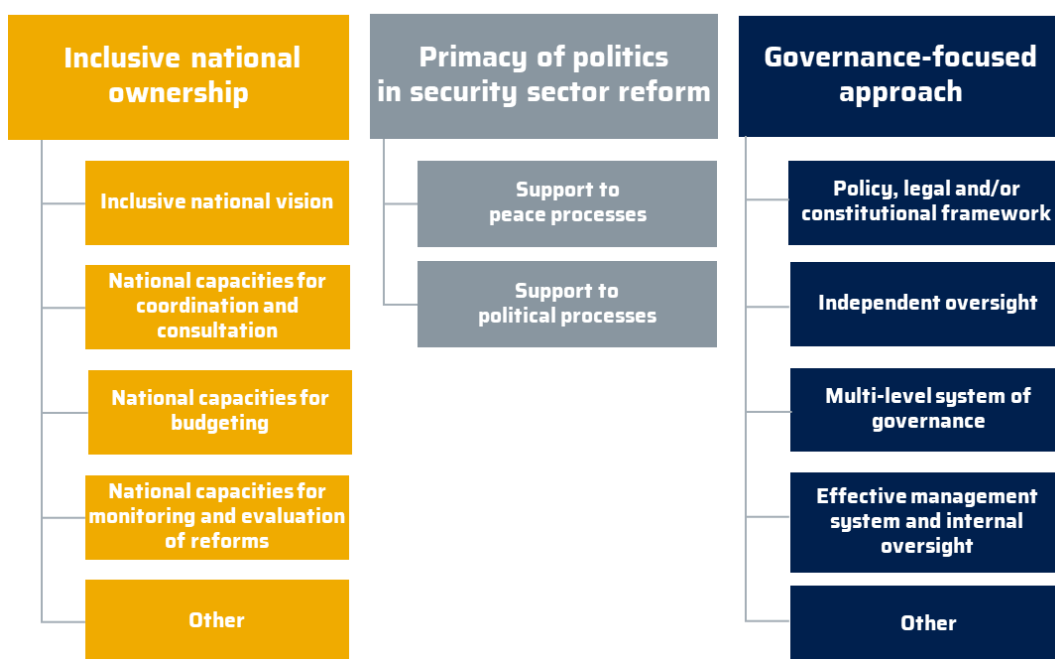
⁵⁵ Fairlie Chappuis and Aditi Gorur, 'Conflicting means, converging goals: Civilian protection and SSR' in *The United Nations and Security Sector Reform: Policy and Practice*, edited by Adedeji Ebo and Heiner Hänggi (DCAF, 2020), p. 204.

⁵⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2387, S/RES/2387 (15 November 2017).

4. How do SSR mandates align with the UN’s normative framework on SSR?

The 2022 Report of the UN Secretary-General on ‘Strengthening security sector reform’ (S/2022/280) outlined three principles that should guide the UN’s approach to SSR: ‘(a) ...*inclusive national ownership*, with a focus on the meaningful participation and representation of local communities, women, young people and civil society; (b) ...*the primacy of politics*; and (c) ...*a governance-focused approach* anchoring the Organization’s actions in United Nations values’ (emphasis added).⁵⁷ These principles are not new; they are already embedded in the two thematic Security Council resolutions on SSR (2151 (2014) and 2553 (2020)). However, experience has shown that the UN needs to strengthen efforts in these areas. This was underscored at a UN Security Council briefing on SSR in March 2023, where South Africa, as co-chair of the **UN Group of Friends of SSR**, urged all Security Council members and the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform ‘**to integrate the tenets of resolution 2553 (2020) into country-specific mandates on SSR**’, ensuring alignment with the UN’s vision of SSR’.⁵⁸

Figure 4.1. Sub-categories identified for the three main principles of SSR



To identify good practice, the extent to which country-specific mandates on SSR align with the UN’s normative framework on SSR was analysed. This involved an assessment of the objectives of mandated SSR support, which were categorized according to one (and if relevant, two) of the three principles of SSR support laid out in the Report of the Secretary-General.⁵⁹ Then, further sub-categories were assigned to these objectives,

⁵⁷ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, *Strengthening Security Sector Reform*, S/2022/280 (15 March 2022), p. 2.

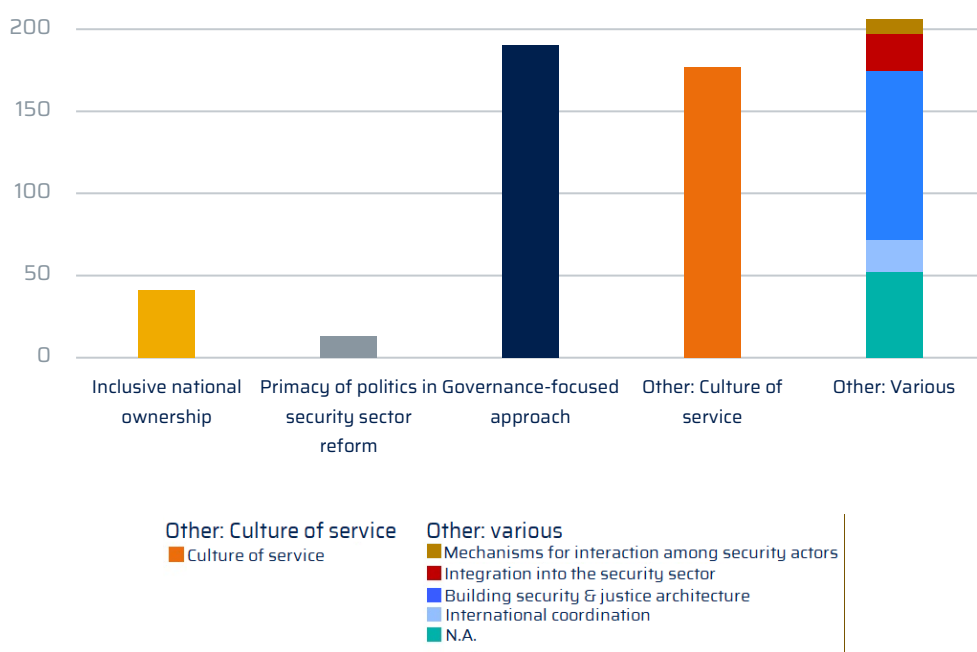
⁵⁸ See the comments of Ms. Joyini (South Africa) in: United Nations Security Council, Record of 9285th meeting, *Maintenance of international peace and security*, S/PV.9285 (16 March 2023).

⁵⁹ In other words, categories and sub-categories are not exclusive to each other, so that a single objective can be coded under different categories and/or sub-categories. For example, support may be mandated to ‘encourage and accelerate national ownership of SSR by the national authorities, including through the finalisation and implementation of a national strategy for the establishment of effective, inclusive and accountable security and justice institutions’ – which both promotes *inclusive national ownership* and a *governance-focused approach* through the adoption of a *policy framework*. This is why results are presented in absolute numbers and not in percentages.

as seen in Figure 4.1.⁶⁰ All told, 496 mandated SSR activities were identified for review, in the 20 missions examined.

The relative distribution of mandates across these three principles is shown in Figure 4.2. However, not all SSR mandates fit neatly within these categories, as some had distinct, recurrent objectives that extended beyond the three core principles. To address this, two additional categories were introduced. The first, 'culture of service', encompasses activities aimed at fostering respect for human rights, promoting gender equality, ensuring child protection, and building institutional integrity. The second, 'other', includes mandates related to international coordination of SSR support, building security and justice institutions, integrating ex-combatants into a security sector, and creating mechanisms for interaction among security actors⁶¹. Activities that did not fit within these categories depicted in Figure 4.2. were labelled N.A.⁶²

Figure 4.2. Number of SSR activities identified, by objective (SSR principles and other)



4.1. Promoting inclusive national ownership of SSR

To ensure genuine national ownership of SSR, external support must be guided by and rooted in the leadership of national and local stakeholders.⁶³ The two thematic UN Security Council resolutions on SSR emphasize both 'the centrality of national ownership' and the responsibility of national actors in determining SSR needs.⁶⁴ These resolutions also encourage the engagement of all relevant stakeholders in reform efforts as well as the

⁶⁰ The sub-categories under the principle of inclusive national ownership are based on the UN SSR Task Force's Integrated Technical Guidance Note on *National Ownership of Security Sector Reform* (2012); those under the primacy of politics were drawn from a review of objectives in this category; and those under a governance-focused approach are adapted from the Integrated Technical Guidance Note on *Democratic Governance of the Security Sector* (2012).

⁶¹ In the UN Secretary-General Report of 2008, mechanisms of interaction among security actors are defined as common features of effective and accountable security sectors, aiming at "establishing transparent modalities for coordination and cooperation among different actors, based on their respective constitutional/legal roles and responsibilities". United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General, Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform, A/62/659-S/2008/39*.

⁶² The activities in SSR mandates labelled N.A. were often described in vague language, such as 'support for the government on SSR'.

⁶³ United Nations SSR Task Force, *Security Sector Reform: Integrated Technical Guidance Notes*, p. 16.

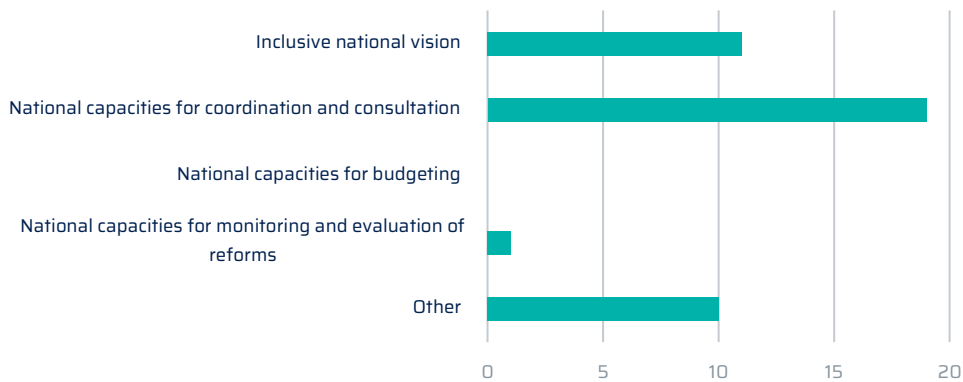
⁶⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2151, S/RES/2151 (28 April 2014) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2553, S/RES/2553 (3 December 2020).

development of national and local expertise in SSR.⁶⁵ This aligns with the 2022 Report of the UN Secretary-General on SSR (S/2022/280), which highlights the importance of *inclusive* national ownership fostered through meaningful consultations with local communities and the promotion of local dialogue.⁶⁶

The UN’s SSR policy framework also recognizes that national ownership requires ‘building government capacities for coordination and consultation, national security budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation of reforms’.⁶⁷ For this study, references in SSR mandates to fostering an inclusive national vision – such as consultations with local communities, inclusive dialogue, and the development of a national vision – were considered integral to promoting inclusive national ownership. Similarly, activities aimed at building national capacities for coordination and consultation (both internal and international), budgeting (e.g., national financing, public expenditure reviews), or the monitoring and evaluation of reforms were categorized under this objective. Additionally, a catchall ‘other’ category was used to capture mandates broadly related to national ownership but not easily classified within these sub-categories. These often focused on facilitating the transfer of security responsibilities from a mission to a government, particularly in the context of transitions (e.g. UNMIL, UNOCI, UNSOM).⁶⁸

This analysis found that **SSR is rarely linked to national ownership**, appearing in only **41 of the 496 mandated activities** reviewed. The term ‘national ownership’ was explicitly mentioned just 11 times, all within MONUSCO’s mandates. While other mandates did not use the term directly, some included provisions aligned with it – particularly calls for developing a ‘common national vision’ and strengthening national capacities for coordination and consultation.⁶⁹ Furthermore, with one exception, objectives related to building national capacities for budgeting or monitoring and evaluating reforms were not mentioned explicitly.

Figure 4.3. Number of SSR activities linked to inclusive national ownership, by sub-category



4.2. Linking SSR to the primacy of politics

The emphasis on the primacy of politics—where UN field operations work to advance political solutions to conflict and ensure all mission activities are aligned with this goal—has significantly increased since the publication of the HIPPO Report in 2015 and the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Report of the Secretary-General, *Strengthening Security Sector Reform*, S/2022/280 (15 March 2022).

⁶⁷ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2553, S/RES/2553 (3 December 2020).

⁶⁸ For example, UNOCI is mandated to “continue to focus on supporting the Government on DDR, collection of weapons and SSR... with the objective of transitioning security responsibilities from UNOCI to the Government”. See: United Nations Security Council Resolution 2226 (2015), S/RES/2226, (25 June 2015).

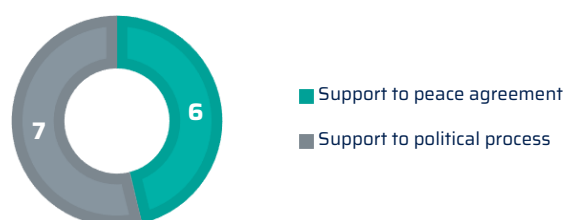
⁶⁹ For example, the mandate for MONUSCO calls for the mission “to encourage and accelerate national ownership of SSR by the Government of the DRC, including through the development of a common national vision”; and to work with the government of the DRC “in the reform of the police, including by assisting the Comité de réforme de la police, and by advocating for the establishment of the Secrétariat Général à la sécurité et à l’ordre public that will coordinate security institutions with a law enforcement mission”. See: UN Security Council Resolution 2348, S/RES/2348 (31 March 2017).

launch of the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative in 2018.⁷⁰ However, the political dimension of SSR support is not a new concept. The first ever Report of the UN Secretary-General on SSR (S/2008/39) already underscored SSR as ‘a highly political process’, vital to addressing questions of security at the outset of a peace process to avoid sowing the seeds for future conflict.⁷¹ This view is echoed in the two UN Security Council thematic resolutions on SSR, which highlight that SSR ‘constitutes a key element of the political processes of States recovering from conflict’ and ‘needs to be in support of, and informed by, broader national political processes’.⁷²

In this study, the extent to which SSR mandates explicitly support the primacy of politics was assessed based on references to political or peace processes.⁷³ SSR was referenced in the mandates of BINUCA, MINUSCA, and UNSMIL in the context of peace processes, and in the mandates of MONUSCO, UNIPSIL, UNMIL, UNOCI, and UNSOM in relation to political processes. For instance, in relation to political processes, UNSMIL’s mandate under UNSCR 2144 (2014) called for providing good offices to support an inclusive political settlement and promote a political environment for the integration of ex-combatants into the security sector. In relation to peace processes, MINUSCA’s UNSCR 2605 (2021) highlighted the need to promote a coherent peace process connecting local and national peace efforts with work to advance SSR.

However, despite these exceptions, the vast majority of **SSR mandates are not explicitly linked to support for political processes or peace processes**, with only 13 of 496 mandated SSR activities explicitly falling into one of these sub-categories (see Figure 4.4).⁷⁴ Moreover, while the primacy of politics would suggest a focus on political solutions to address the root causes of conflict, SSR was seldom explicitly connected to these efforts in mandates. This reinforces the finding in section 3, which showed that SSR mandates were rarely linked to priority tasks associated with political processes. Even when SSR was referenced in relation to peace processes, it was largely framed in terms of technical implementation rather than shaping or advancing the peace process itself.

Figure 4.4. Number of SSR activities linked to the primacy of politics, by sub-category



⁷⁰ Adam Day, et al., *The Political Practice of Peacekeeping: How Strategies for Peace Operations are Developed and Implemented* (United Nations University Centre for Policy Research and the Stimson Center, 2020), 5.

⁷¹ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General: Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform*, A/62/659–S/2008/39, paras. 36 and 21.

⁷² United Nations Security Council Resolution 2151, S/RES/2151 (28 April 2014) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2553, S/RES/2553 (3 December 2020).

⁷³ Each extract was individually assessed to determine whether mandated SSG/R support was designed to contribute to political processes, such as political settlements, transitions, power-sharing arrangements, or the mediation of peace agreements. Extracts that explicitly referenced support for a peace agreement were separated from broader political processes to provide more nuanced findings. Political processes that could be interpreted as either political or technical—depending on the nature of the support (e.g., assistance with ex-combatant integration)—were excluded from this classification. As a result, the actual extent of political support may have been broader in practice than what was explicitly reflected in mandates.

⁷⁴ That said, it is possible that some SSR support is linked to the primacy of politics by its incorporation into relevant priority tasks on peace processes or political processes, without any explicit mention of the term peace processes or political processes in the excerpts of the mandates that stipulate these SSR activities. However, as detailed in section 3, above, SSR rarely figures under the priority task of ‘political processes’ in missions that have included this as a priority task.

4.3. Adopting a governance-focused approach to SSR

The 2022 Report of the UN Secretary-General on SSR (S/2022/280) notes, ‘security sector reforms that neglect the prevailing norms that shape security sector governance and focus on technical security approaches alone lack effectiveness’. This is consistent with the thematic Security Council resolutions on SSR (2151 (2014) and 2553 (2020)), both of which state that ‘good governance and oversight of the security sector is important in ensuring’ that security institutions can protect a population.⁷⁵ Resolution 2151 also underlines the importance of ‘sector-wide initiatives that aim to enhance the governance and overall performance of the security sector’.⁷⁶

A governance-focused approach should be underpinned by efforts to promote the accountability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness of the security sector. Indeed, if security actors are not held accountable – through internal and external oversight mechanisms – they are likely to engage in corrupt, abusive and discriminatory behaviour which undermines trust and fuels grievances. Similarly, if the security sector is not effective – and thus lacks policy frameworks clarifying roles and responsibilities, coordination mechanisms, and adequate skills and capacities, it cannot deliver security to the population. Finally, if the security sector is not inclusive of all segments of the population, it can lead to ineffective and biased security responses and generate broader social grievances regarding barriers to entry to the security sector. Promoting these principles through SSR support is therefore important to ensure that the security sector can deliver security to the population, and does not fuel grievances which contribute to violence and conflict.

Only a minority of mission mandates contained broad references to supporting governance principles. Notably, MONUSCO was the only mission whose mandates explicitly called for the development of ‘accountable, effective, and inclusive’ security institutions. A handful of other mandates, such as those of MONUSCO, UNITAMS, and UNSMIL, emphasized the need to enhance the accountability and/or effectiveness of security institutions. Slightly more mandates addressed these principles in relation to rule of law institutions, such as police and penitentiary systems, as seen in UNSOM, MINUSCA, and MINUJUSTH. Explicit references to inclusiveness were less common, appearing in only few mandates – some focusing on supporting inclusive security institutions (e.g. MONUSCO, UNMISS, UNOCI) while others emphasized ensuring that security is delivered in an inclusive manner (e.g. UNSOM).

To enable a more nuanced understanding of activities within a broad governance-driven approach, the mandates were categorised based on references to support for: i) a ‘*policy, legal and/or constitutional framework*’; ii) ‘*independent oversight*’, including support to legislatures, independent bodies, and civil society; iii) a ‘*multi-level system of governance*’, capturing activities that promote the role of local or regional governments (e.g., decentralization); iv) an ‘*effective management system and internal oversight*’, encompassing efforts to strengthen human and financial resource management, policy implementation, and internal accountability mechanisms.⁷⁷

As shown in Figure 4.5, mandated SSR activities contributing to a governance-focused approach were primarily directed towards an ‘effective management system and internal oversight’ (64 instances), a ‘policy, legal, and/or constitutional framework’ (63), and a ‘multi-level system of governance’ (54). Within the latter category, although most activities that emphasized decentralization or the restoration of state authority theoretically align with

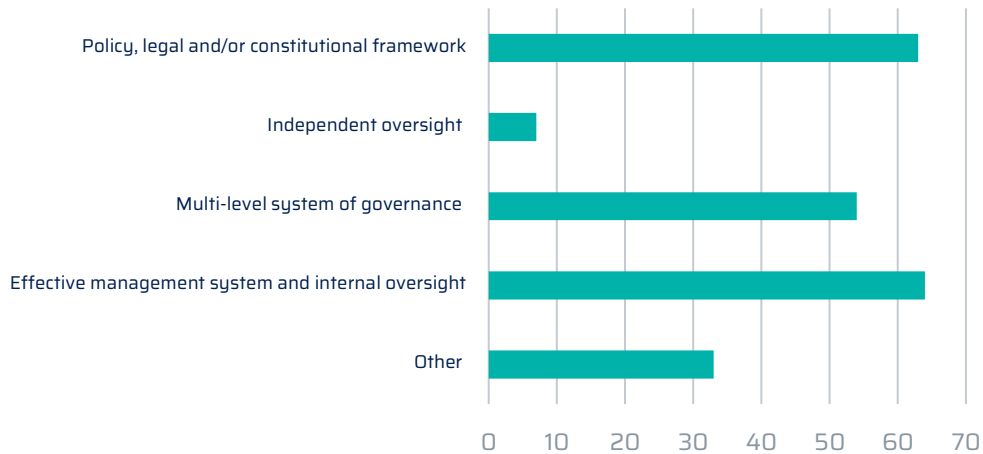
⁷⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2151, S/RES/2151 (28 April 2014) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2553, S/RES/2553 (3 December 2020).

⁷⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2151, S/RES/2151 (28 April 2014), 4.

⁷⁷ These criteria were drawn from the ITGN on ‘Democratic Governance of the Security Sector’ in *Security Sector Reform: Integrated Technical Guidance Notes* (New York: United Nations, 2012).

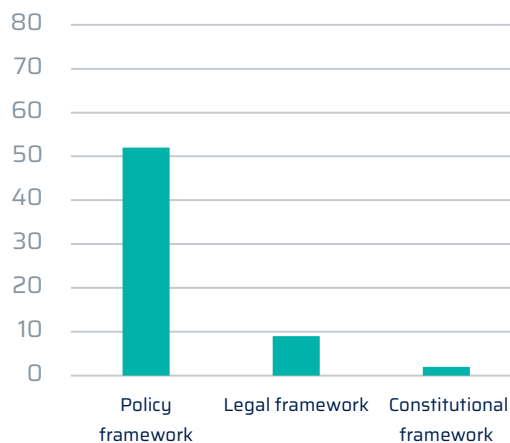
efforts to strengthen local governance structures, the general language in mandates often makes it challenging to establish this connection in practice. A key finding was the notably low number of explicit references to strengthening ‘independent oversight’ (7). The category on ‘other’ included mandates related to governance – such as calls for accountability, effectiveness and inclusiveness – but lacked specificity regarding the type of support to be provided.

Figure 4.5. Number of SSR activities linked to a governance-focused approach, by sub-category



Where activities targeted the design or improvement of **policy, legal, and/or constitutional frameworks**, the majority focused on strengthening policy frameworks (52), with less emphasis on legal (9) and constitutional (2) frameworks. Examples include mandates seeking to develop ‘a common national vision, to be encapsulated in a national security policy, as well as a clear and comprehensive SSR implementation roadmap’ (MONUSCO), or to ‘assist the parties to develop a strategy to address disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) activities’ (UNMISS).

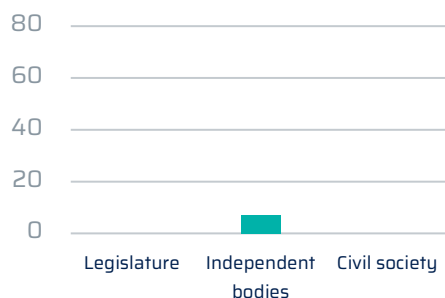
Figure 4.6. Number of SSR activities pertaining to policy, legal, and/or constitutional frameworks, by focus



Meanwhile, support for **independent oversight** within SSR mandates is very rarely made explicit. In fact, only 7 mandated SSR activities, spanning four missions (BNUB, MINUSCA, UNAMA, UNMIT), were found to address the objective of strengthening independent oversight bodies. These efforts primarily focused on strengthening national human rights institutions and on promoting ‘civilian oversight’ of security institutions. Moreover, as illustrated in Figure 4.7, no SSR activities were found to have the stated objective of strengthening the oversight role of the legislature or civil society; though, in

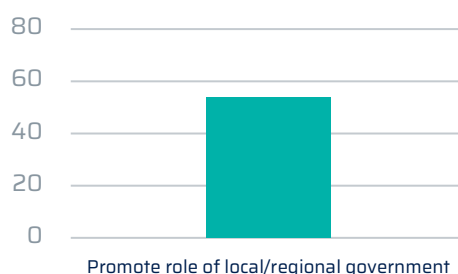
some mandates, language calling to support ‘accountable’ security institutions could be seen to implicitly provide for such engagement.

Figure 4.7. Number of SSR activities pertaining to independent oversight, by focus



The role of SSR in fostering a **multi-level system of governance** was reflected in the mandates of nine missions, with 54 examples primarily focused on promoting decentralization and/or RESA. While such activities are ideally intended to strengthen a multi-level system of governance by empowering local and regional governments to exercise authority in a decentralised manner, the broad language used in mandates makes this connection difficult to infer in practice. Only a limited number of these mandates explicitly recognized the need to pair the deployment of security forces with efforts to strengthen local governance structures. For instance, the UNITAMS mandate called for support to ‘extend state presence and inclusive civilian governance’, particularly by ‘strengthening accountable rule of law and security sector institutions’.⁷⁸ Similarly, MINUSTAH’s mandate called for support to decentralisation and extension of State authority including through the promotion of good governance at local levels.⁷⁹

Figure 4.8. Number of SSR activities pertaining to a multi-level system of governance



A significant number of SSR activities were linked to **effective management systems and internal oversight**, with a majority aimed at improving human resources in the security sector (40), primarily focused on strengthening the vetting of security personnel. For example, the MINUSCA mandate calls to ‘support the [national] authorities in the training of police and gendarmerie and in the selection, recruitment, and vetting of police and gendarmerie elements’.⁸⁰ Additionally, some SSR activities focused on strengthening internal oversight and accountability (24), such as the mandate for MINUSCA to support the establishment of oversight mechanisms within the Internal Security Forces.⁸¹ As Figure 4.9. reflects, however, no SSR activities were identified relating to financial management (e.g., transparent procurement systems, auditing), policy implementation (e.g., support to change management), or information management (e.g., recordkeeping, data analysis).

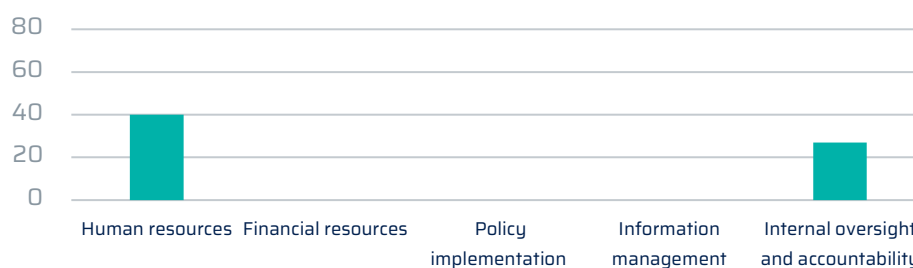
⁷⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2524, S/RES/2524 (3 June 2020).

⁷⁹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2070, S/RES/2070 (12 October 2012).

⁸⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2605, S/RES/2605 (12 November 2021).

⁸¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2387, S/RES/2387 (15 November 2017).

Figure 4.9. Number of SSR activities pertaining to effective management systems and internal oversight, by focus



4.4 Additional objectives of mandated support

Within the category of additional objectives of mandated support, a very high number of SSR activities (177) were identified as aiming to promote a **culture of service**. The majority of these were dedicated to strengthening respect for **human rights** (71), **gender equality** (55), and **child protection** (49), with only 2 activities mandated to build integrity in the security sector through **anti-corruption** efforts (see Figure 4.10). For instance, UNSCR 2605 (2021) stipulates that MINUSCA ‘assist the CAR authorities in ensuring that the protection of children’s rights is taken into account, inter alia, in the DDDR and SSR processes’.

Figure 4.10. Number of SSR activities pertaining to a culture of service, by focus



Broad references to **building the security and justice architecture** were also highly prominent, with 103 activities identified.⁸² **International coordination** emerged as another key objective, with 20 extracts highlighting the importance of collaboration among international partners. For instance, a mandate of MINUSCA included coordinating ‘the provision of technical assistance and training between the international partners in the CAR (...) in order to ensure a clear distribution of tasks in the field of SSR’⁸³. Additionally, 22 SSR activities focused on the **integration of former combatants into the security sector**. For example, UNAMI was tasked to ‘advise, support, and assist (...) the Government of Iraq with progress on security sector reform, including by prioritizing the planning, funding, and implementation of efforts to strengthen state control and reintegration programmes for former members of armed groups’⁸⁴. Finally, a few mandates focused on enhancing **coordination** between national security institutions (8). The MINUSCA mandate stipulates, for instance, that the mission provide advice in view of

⁸² These mandates typically emphasised reforms aimed at enhancing the independence of the judiciary, and establishing law enforcement and correctional systems. UN Security Council resolution 2144 (2014), S/RES/2144, 14 March 2014.

⁸³ UN Security Council Resolution 2387, S/RES/2387 (15 November 2017).

⁸⁴ UN Security Council Resolution 2576, S/RES/2576 (27 May 2021).

‘... ensuring coherence of the SSR process, including through a clear delineation of responsibilities between the [armed forces], the [internal security forces] and other uniformed entities ...’⁸⁵

4.5. Key findings

This analysis of whether and how UN Security Council mandates on SSR refer to the UN’s own normative framework on SSR, and its focus on the principles of inclusive ownership, primacy of politics, and governance-driven approaches, revealed that:

➤ **Country-specific resolutions do not refer explicitly to the Security Council’s two thematic resolutions on SSR.**

UN Security Council resolutions 2151 (2014) and 2553 (2020) – the two thematic resolutions on SSR – are not cited in *any* of the country-specific resolutions passed to renew mission mandates, in the preamble or in the operative text. Yet, other thematic resolutions on topics such as the rule of law, arms control, WPS (Women, Peace and Security), and YPS (Youth, Peace and Security) are regularly referenced in these resolutions.⁸⁶ More emphasis should be placed on ensuring that country-specific resolutions draw on the normative framework of the UN, as reflected in these thematic resolutions, by explicitly referencing the promotion of inclusive ownership, the primacy of politics, and governance-focused approaches.

➤ **Inclusive ownership, and building national capacities to lead reform efforts, is rarely an explicit goal of mandated SSR support.**

Inclusive ownership, including support to national capacities to lead reform efforts, should be prioritized from the outset of a mission. A key challenge is that the Security Council occasionally overestimates what peace operations can achieve in the absence of capable government. Indeed, ‘the weak capacity of the host State can seriously challenge the assumptions underlying a political strategy’.⁸⁷ This is particularly relevant in the context of mission transitions, which require early and sustained engagement with national counterparts to develop strategies for strengthening capacities in the areas they will assume responsibility for once the mission withdraws.⁸⁸

Some of the mandates examined in this study recognized the need to transfer leadership to national authorities and highlighted the importance of building national capacities. For example, in 2016, the Security Council tasked UNMIL with handing over its SSR tasks to the Liberian government (UNSCR 2333). This followed a 2015 mandate (UNSCR 2239) which had directed the mission to assist the government in coordinating SSR efforts with bilateral and multilateral partners. However, a lessons-learning exercise on UNMIL found that the UN had waited too long to build the capacity of national actors in Liberia to effectively support coordination efforts. It was only after the mission transitioned to the UN country team that the absence of a dedicated national coordination mechanism became evident.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ UN Security Council Resolution 2605 S/RES/2605 (12 November 2021).

⁸⁶ For example, the thematic resolutions on justice and rule of law, UN Security Council Resolution 2150 S/RES/2150 (16 April 2014), and UN Security Council Resolution 1502 S/RES/1502 (26 August 2003), are cited in 5 and 12 resolutions, respectively; UN Security Council Resolution 1325 S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000) on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is referenced in 101 resolutions; and UN Security Council Resolution 1674, S/RES/1674 (28 April 2006) on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict appeared in 34 resolutions.

⁸⁷ Day, et al., *The Political Practice of Peacekeeping*, p. 16.

⁸⁸ United Nations Development Programme, *UN Transitions Project: Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal – Annual report July 2020–June 2021* (New York: UNDP, 2021).

⁸⁹ Vincenza Scherrer and Alba Bescos Pou, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for Security Sector Reform: A Mapping Study covering the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (DCAF, 2018).

With the aim of ensuring that national counterparts are well equipped to lead the development of an inclusive national vision for SSR, and can implement it in practice, the Security Council should systematically reflect on the type of support required to build national ownership and national capacities for SSR. The progress made in helping national actors develop an inclusive national vision for SSR must be matched by greater efforts to encourage capacity building, placing national actors at the centre of coordination, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation in line with the UN Secretary-General's third report on SSR (2022).⁹⁰

➤ **SSR is not systematically leveraged in mission mandates as a tool to support political processes.**

The security sector is likely to be at the heart of any transformative political strategy that peace operations seek to support, and should be viewed upfront through this political lens. However, SSR mandates remain underutilized as a tool for advancing political solutions to the root causes of conflict and fostering peace. This is evident both in how mandates are formulated and in the priority tasks under which they are placed. A mere 13 of the 496 mandated SSR activities under study were coded as explicitly related to support for political processes and peace processes. Strengthening the link between SSR and political processes – including national dialogues, political settlements, transitions, and the mediation of peace agreements – would enhance SSR's strategic contribution to these efforts.

Good offices should be a core element of support for political and peace processes, helping to advance political solutions to conflict. Both of the thematic resolutions on SSR encourage Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) to fully recognise the value of SSR in their work, including through good offices, where mandated. This approach can support negotiated changes in the composition and structure of security institutions, fostering more equitable distributions of power and resources. Despite its importance, the use of good offices in SSR mandates remains limited, missing a key opportunity to advance political processes and conflict resolution.⁹¹

Good offices are particularly required at the senior leadership level to seek political agreements that will enable technical support to proceed. Experience shows that when SSR is not addressed by UN senior leadership at the political level, SSR staff at the technical level tend to engage in train and equip approaches which are popular with host governments but unlikely to make a difference where it matters.⁹² Moreover, political engagement tends to have the greatest impact when it is based on systematic and sustained dialogue, rather than when good offices are deployed only to address emerging points of contention.⁹³ Good offices on SSR should thus be systematically anchored in country-specific mission mandates to provide strategic direction to senior leadership on the need for regular political engagement.

➤ **The use of clear language calling for governance-driven reforms that promote effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness of the security sector is limited in mission mandates.**

⁹⁰ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, *Strengthening Security Sector Reform*, S/2022/280 (15 March 2022), para. 6.

⁹¹ Good offices related to SSR in support of political processes were found in the mandates of 6 missions (UNOCI, UNSMIL, UNSOM, MINUSCA, BINUCA and MONUSCO). For instance, UNOCI was tasked with providing good offices and political support to address the root causes of the conflict, including in the area of SSR. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2162, S/RES/2162 (25 June 2014).

⁹² Waldemar Very, Hervé Auffret, Erwin van Veen and Fairlie Chappuis, *Towards Better Security Governance: Learning from the Road Travelled. An independent review of United Nations support to security sector reform in peace operations, 2014–2020*, p.17.

⁹³ This is a lesson learned from UN experience in Liberia. ISSAT, *Lessons Identified from United Nations Mission in Liberia Support to Rule of Law in Liberia* (DCAF, 2018).

This review has revealed that activities classified as ‘governance-driven reforms’ largely reflect a limited interpretation of governance, with minimal focus on promoting key principles of good security sector governance – namely accountability, effectiveness and inclusiveness. Mandates explicitly calling for enhanced accountability of security institutions were notably scarce, appearing in only four missions over the decade under review. Even in these cases, such calls were often fleeting, included in just one or two mandate renewals throughout the entire period.⁹⁴ Furthermore, despite independent oversight being a core element of the UN’s normative SSR agenda, references to strengthening independent oversight bodies or to engaging with civil society were few and far between. Finally, while inclusion is critical for prevention efforts, it received limited attention in the mandates. The review further highlights that mandated support for SSR remains predominantly state-centric, focusing on central government institutions. However, in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, informal structures also play a crucial role, and must be acknowledged as part of broader security governance efforts.

Building political commitment for long-term, governance-driven reforms that place the people at the centre of SSR efforts remains a significant challenge, yet missions must address this issue to engage effectively where it matters. While capacity-building is essential for short-term stability, failing to embed it within a broader SSR strategy focused on establishing good governance of security delivery carries high risks. A notable example is the DRC, where UN support to the national army reportedly bolstered the repressive capacities of security services, reinforcing the authoritarian tendencies of the Kabila government.⁹⁵ Despite this, reforms aimed at strengthening good governance are often perceived as too long-term to be integrated into mission strategies.⁹⁶

While broad language in mandates allows the UN flexibility to address evolving needs on the ground, it often lacks the precision necessary for effective tasking. This lack of clarity can lead to missions deprioritizing or overlooking critical tasks that are not explicitly defined,⁹⁷ meaning that the support missions provide is more often shaped by available resources and capacities than by strategic priorities essential for advancing broader objectives.⁹⁸ This misalignment risks undermining the mission’s ability to deliver impactful and targeted support, particularly in governance-related areas requiring sustained focus and specialised expertise, such as independent oversight, integrity-building or financial management. Thus, it is notable that the articulation of specific SSR provisions in mandates has been found to help steer mission engagement toward a more strategic approach to institution building.⁹⁹ Incorporating stronger governance-driven language could also empower senior UN officials to advocate for sensitive reforms in-country, especially if mandates reference good offices as a tool for fostering commitment to these reforms.

⁹⁴ The exception was MONUSCO, whose mandates consistently emphasized the need to strengthen both the effectiveness and accountability of security institutions.

⁹⁵ Adam Day, et al., *Peacebuilding and Authoritarianism: The Unintended Consequences of UN Engagement in Post-Conflict Settings* (New York: United Nations University, 2021), p. 15.

⁹⁶ It has been noted for example that SSR support can ‘create grey areas when it comes to the utility of benchmarking’, because, even if these benchmarks are important to a sustainable mission exit, it is understood that missions are unlikely to meet objectives in this area. Adam Day, *UN Transitions: Improving Security Council Practice in Mission Settings* (New York: United Nations University, 2019), p. 11.

⁹⁷ In the case of both MONUSCO and MINUSCA, this was true for stabilization tasks. Aditi Gorur, *Defining the Boundaries of UN Stabilization Missions*, p. 20.

⁹⁸ For instance, in the area of DSR support, a comparison of mandates and reporting on implementation—drawn from periodic reports to the UN Security Council—found that, in practice, logistics and the procurement of infrastructure, including equipment, played a greater role than what would be expected based on the mandated tasks.

⁹⁹ This was observed in Liberia, where ‘the inclusion of clear and robust SSR, justice and corrections provisions in the mandate elevated the profile of these components both within the Mission, helping to ensure their adequate resourcing while also stimulating national commitment to these areas on the national reform agenda’. ISSAT, *Lessons Identified from United Nations Mission in Liberia Support to Rule of Law in Liberia*, p. 3.

5. How do SSR mandates align with Switzerland's thematic priorities?

To assess the relevance of SSR mandates to the thematic priorities outlined by Switzerland for its Security Council tenure (building sustainable peace, protecting civilians in armed conflict, and addressing climate security), a keyword search was performed in all SSR mandates for UN missions from 2012 to 2022. This analysis was also extended to address broader themes of interest for Switzerland: elections, transitional justice, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and gender equality. Table 5.1 shows the keywords that were searched to find SSR mandates associated with each of these thematic priorities.

Table 5.1. Keywords searched for each thematic priority

Thematic priority	Keywords searched
Sustainable peace	prevent* (capturing 'prevent', 'preventing', and 'prevention of...'), sustain* + peace (capturing 'sustaining peace' and 'sustainable peace'), root (i.e., 'root causes' or 'root drivers'), cause + conflict, driver + conflict, durable (i.e., 'durable peace'), social + cohesion, national + reconciliation
Climate change	climate (i.e., 'climate change', 'climate security'), environment* (includes 'environmental')
Protection of civilians	protect* + civilian (capturing 'protect', 'protecting', and 'protection' of civilians), protect* + victim, threat + civilian, humanit* (capturing 'humanitarian' but excluding 'crimes against humanity' and 'international humanitarian law'), displaced, IDP, migra* (i.e., 'migration', 'migrant'), refugee, vulnerable groups, minorities
Elections	elect* (i.e., 'election(s)', 'electoral'), vote, poll
Transitional justice	transitional + justice, special + court, SCC, perpetrator
SDGs	sustainable development, SDG, 2030
WPS Agenda/gender equality	gender, women, girls, sexual (as in violence), rape, Women, Peace and Security, WPS, 1325

5.1. Priorities for Switzerland during its tenure on the Security Council

5.1.1. Building Sustainable Peace

Sustaining peace, as defined by UN resolution 2282 (2016), entails 'activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development'.¹⁰⁰ Efforts to sustain peace that do not seek to transform the security sector are likely to fail, because as former President of the General Assembly Miroslav Lajčák has emphasized, security actors 'hold the tools which can pull societies back from the brink of conflict – or push them over the

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2282, S/RES/2282 (27 April 2016).

edge'.¹⁰¹ The UN Sustaining Peace resolution (2282) thus stresses in Article 12 that 'a professional, accountable and effective security sector, including through its reform... [is] critical to consolidation of peace and stability'.

Of the 20 missions reviewed for this study, only three (UNOCI, MONUSCO, UNAMID) explicitly linked SSR to 'sustaining peace' as defined here (in a total of 5 mandates). Among them, only UNOCI did so more than once.¹⁰² In the mandates for both UNOCI and MONUSCO, SSR was tied to sustaining peace through activities aimed at addressing the 'root causes' or 'drivers' of conflict. Similarly, the UNAMID mandate called for strengthening criminal justice institutions – a component of SSR – as a means to address land disputes and other conflict drivers. Notably, while some mandates, such as that of UNITAMS,¹⁰³ referenced sustaining peace, they did not explicitly link it to SSR.

Arguably, while not all SSR initiatives are explicitly linked to sustaining peace, many contribute to this goal by focusing on building good governance. This strengthens the resilience of the security sector during crises and helps mitigate grievances that could fuel violence and conflict.

5.1.2. Protection of Civilians

The objectives of POC and SSR are similar, as both are aimed at keeping people safe. Yet, they are achieved using different methods and tools – as POC is carried out primarily by UN personnel (and secondarily by national actors), focused on short-term prevention and responding to threats of physical violence against civilians,¹⁰⁴ while SSR is a process undertaken by national actors (supported by UN personnel) with the long-term objective of transforming the security sector. These differences mean that PoC and SSR do not always operate in harmony and may at times create friction.¹⁰⁵ However, this makes it all the more crucial to link them in mission mandates. Doing so ensures that when their objectives diverge, mission priorities can be clarified, and when they align, synergies can be maximized through mutually reinforcing activities.

As highlighted in Section 3.1, SSR is occasionally included under the priority tasks of POC. Beyond these tasks, SSR was also more broadly linked to PoC across mandates, although it appeared in the mandates of only six missions (with 28 references). SSR was often connected to PoC in mandates aimed at strengthening community security. For instance, UNITAMS and UNAMID referenced SSR in the context of community policing to enhance civilian protection. Additionally, several missions (UNMISS, MONUSCO, UNMIL, MINUSMA, and UNSMIL) were tasked with improving the security sector's ability to protect women, reinforcing broader POC efforts. Accountability also emerged as a key theme, with missions such as MONUSCO, UNAMA, and UNMISS mandated to promote accountability and combat impunity as part of their civilian protection responsibilities.

5.1.3. Climate Change

As both a risk and threat-multiplier, climate change is increasingly understood as a serious challenge to security sectors.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, **climate change directly impacts the work of**

¹⁰¹ See: Vincenza Scherrer and Alba Bescos Pou, *Security Sector Reform and Sustaining Peace: Proceedings of the High-Level Roundtable* (DCAF, 2018), p. 13.

¹⁰² United Nations Security Council Resolution 2162, S/RES/2162 (25 June 2014), United Nations Security Council Resolution 2226, S/RES/2226 (25 June 2015), and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2284, S/RES/2284 (28 April 2016).

¹⁰³ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2524, S/RES/2524 (3 June 2020), and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2579, S/RES/2579 (3 June 2021).

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Department of Peace Operations, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, Policy Ref. 2023.05.

¹⁰⁵ Fairlie Chappuis and Aditi Gorur, 'Conflicting means, converging goals: Civilian protection and SSR' in *The United Nations and Security Sector Reform: Policy and Practice*, edited by Adedeji Ebo and Heiner Hänggi (DCAF, 2020), pp. 203–206.

¹⁰⁶ Hans Born, *Climate Change and its Impact on Security Provision: The Role of Good Security Sector Governance and Reform*, DCAF, September 2021.

security sector actors, affecting ‘everything from operations to equipment’.¹⁰⁷

Security sectors can play a role in mitigating and preventing their own (and others’) negative impact on climate change, adapting to climate-constrained environments to ensure they can continue to provide effective and accountable security, responding (reactively and proactively) to climate-related disasters and insecurity, and developing integrated mechanisms of cross-sectoral cooperation with local communities and international partners.¹⁰⁸ To that end, SSR plays an important role in building the resilience of security sector actors to the impacts of climate change, and in improving their responses to these climate-related security challenges.¹⁰⁹ This includes adapting national security strategies and oversight practices, as well as modifying logistics processes, infrastructure, and equipment.¹¹⁰

Importantly, the security implications of adverse effects of climate change have begun to be recognized in some Security Council resolutions.¹¹¹ Yet, this has not been linked to SSR in the country-specific resolutions from which missions draw their mandates. In fact, this review found that **climate change and its repercussions on security were never linked to SSR in any of the mandates under study**. Given the growing body of evidence on the key role played by security sectors in addressing climate-related security threats, the Security Council should acknowledge this, and should reflect on the role of security sectors in civilian protection aimed at addressing climate-related insecurity and disasters. Promoting these links between SSR and climate change in the context of relevant open debates and country-specific discussions could also help to develop a baseline consensus on language that can be used in country-specific mandates in the future, as this is likely to become a central challenge on the ground.

5.2. Other Swiss priorities

5.2.1. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and Gender Equality

Integrating a gender perspective into SSR strengthens local ownership, enhances security and justice delivery, and improves oversight and accountability.¹¹² Applying the principles of good SSG also supports the goals of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, as recognized in UN Security Council resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions.¹¹³ This relationship between SSR, gender equality, and the WPS agenda was reflected in the SSR mandates reviewed, with **70 references identified across 45 resolutions related to 10 of the 20 missions** (UNMIL, UNOCI, UNSMIL, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, BINUH, BNUB, UNMISS, and UNMIT).¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Flavia Eichmann, *The Impact of Climate Change on Global and Local Security Governance: Learning from Local Experiences of the Security Sector*, Seminar Report, UNOG-DCAF Seminar, 10 December 2020, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Jared Rigg and Gabriela Manea, *SSR and Climate Change*, Crossroads Module 10.2, United Nations, 2024.

¹⁰⁹ Gabriela Manea, *Climate Change and Security Sector Governance and Reform*, SSR Backgrounder Series (DCAF, 2023), Figure 2, p.6.

¹¹⁰ Maria-Gabriela Manea, *The Security Sector and Climate Change*, Geneva Global Policy Briefs No. 2, 2021.

¹¹¹ For example, see: United Nations Security Council Resolution 2423, S/RES/2423 (28 June 2018).

¹¹² Henri Myrtilinen, ‘Security Sector Governance, Security Sector Reform and Gender’, Tool 1 in *Gender and Security Toolkit*, edited by Megan Bastick (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, and UN Women, 2019).

¹¹³ Nenad Galić and Megan Bastick, ‘International and Regional Laws and Instruments related to Gender Equality and the Security and Justice Sector’, Annex in *Gender and Security Toolkit*, edited by Megan Bastick (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, and UN Women, 2020).

¹¹⁴ Six missions were mandated to mainstream gender perspectives throughout all activities including in SSR (7 mandates for MINUSCA, 8 for MINUSMA, 6 for MONUSCO, 2 for UNMISS, 1 for UNMIT, and 4 for UNSMIL).

SSR was linked to three of the four pillars of the WPS agenda – participation, protection, and prevention¹¹⁵ – through mandates that called on missions to support:

- **Participation: Strengthening women’s full, effective, and meaningful participation in the security sector and SSR processes.** This was reflected in 4 mandates for UNSMIL, 13 for MINUSCA, 9 for MONUSCO, and 10 for MINUSMA. Some mandates explicitly called for engagement with women’s networks as partners in SSR efforts (e.g. MONUSCO), while several for MINUSCA emphasised increasing the recruitment of women in police forces.
- **Protection: Advancing SSR with a gender-sensitive approach, particularly in addressing gender-based violence (GBV).** This included mandates to support victims of sexual violence perpetrated by armed forces (3 for UNSMIL, 3 for MINUSMA, 2 for UNMIL, 6 for UNMISS, and 6 for MONUSCO). Some mandates focused specifically on gender mainstreaming in police reform (2 mandates for UNMIL, 3 for UNOCI, 2 for UNSMIL, 1 for BINUH, 2 for BNUB, and 5 for UNMISS), incorporating capacity-building, training and sensitization on sexual and gender-based violence and/or conflict-related sexual violence.
- **Prevention: Enhancing the security sector’s responsiveness to women’s needs,** reflected in 2 mandates for UNSMIL and 1 for UNMIT. These efforts included promoting reforms in police and security institutions aimed at making them more accessible and responsive to women and vulnerable groups.

5.2.2. SDGs

In the 2030 Agenda, the UN has stressed the interconnected nature of security and development with the inclusion of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) on ‘promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies’. SSR is firmly embedded within SDG 16, the sub-targets of which are directed at developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions (16.6); promoting the rule of law and access to justice (16.3); and ensuring responsive, inclusive, and representative decision-making (16.7); while reducing violence (16.1), organized crime (16.4), and corruption (16.5). Security more generally, and SSR specifically, are also integrated into other SDGs, including SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 11 on safer cities.

While the term *sustainable development* appeared in only a few of the mandates analysed in this study,¹¹⁶ **it was never explicitly linked to SSR**, despite the considerable overlap between SSR objectives and the implementation strategies of certain SDGs. Nonetheless, **many SSR-related activities mandated by the Security Council can be seen as contributing to sustainable development**, with the objectives of SDG 16 inherently embedded in the broader goals of peace operations.

5.2.3. Elections

Free and fair elections are vital to sustaining peace by promoting democracy, upholding stability, and fostering trust.¹¹⁷ The security sector—particularly the police—plays a crucial role in ensuring the security necessary for fair elections, especially in volatile

¹¹⁵ The fourth pillar, ‘relief and recovery’, is more directly tied to humanitarian efforts.

¹¹⁶ The 2030 Agenda was only referenced twice in operative parts of a resolution (both in the case of UNSOM), while sustainable development was referenced in 15 resolutions across 8 missions.

¹¹⁷ For UN resources on elections, see: United Nations Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, ‘Elections’, <https://dppa.un.org/en/elections> (accessed 6 June 2023).

environments.¹¹⁸ When armed groups are able to attack polling stations, it not only undermines state legitimacy but also weakens broader efforts to build trust and political consensus.¹¹⁹ At the same time, **democratic oversight of the security sector is critical to preventing it from becoming a destabilizing force in elections, such as by enabling unequal access for voters.**¹²⁰

Despite this, the link between SSR and elections appeared in only three instances among the mandates reviewed for this study, specifically in the contexts of UNMIL and MONUSCO. In these cases, **elections were referenced primarily in relation to supporting police through training to fulfil their security role.** For MONUSCO, given concerns over human rights violations and abuses during the 2011 electoral process, two mandates explicitly incorporated a human rights component in line with the UN's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP). For UNMIL, the focus was on strengthening leadership, internal management, and accountability in election security.

5.2.4. Transitional justice

In societies emerging from repressive rule or armed conflict, both SSR and transitional justice processes are essential for addressing past human rights abuses and ensuring such violations are prevented in the future. In many contexts, security actors have either failed to prevent the most serious abuses, or have been involved in perpetrating them directly.¹²¹ As a result, **reforming the security sector is a critical means of ensuring that previous violations are not repeated.** SSR and transitional justice are thus closely intertwined, functioning as complementary tools.¹²² Together, they provide a foundation for reconciliation, support the reform of abusive institutions and security structures, and enhance oversight and accountability.¹²³

However, this study found that **SSR activities were explicitly linked to transitional justice in only 1 instance** across mission mandates, and this dated back to 2012. At that time, the Security Council urged the government of the DRC to 'operationalize and implement, with the support of MONUSCO, a national and comprehensive vision and strategy for the security and justice sectors, *including in the area of transitional justice*, in order to establish democratic, accountable and professional national security and judicial institutions' (emphasis added).¹²⁴ Still, it is fair to say that many SSR activities indirectly contribute to the objectives of transitional justice, such as those related to vetting security sector personnel and increasing accountability.

¹¹⁸ In fact, '[p]olice and security forces have a dual role in an election setting, providing security for electors while also ensuring that they do not interfere with the rights of the electorate'. Centre for Human Rights, *Human Rights and Elections: A Handbook on the Legal, Technical, and Human Rights Aspects of Elections*, Professional Training Series No. 2 (United Nations, 1994), para. 94–97.

¹¹⁹ This was seen in the 2020 elections in the Central Africa Republic, where violent interferences by armed groups during the voting process included attacks on and the ransacking of polling stations as well as serious fighting in several provincial towns. See: International Crisis Group, 'Picking up the Pieces in the Central African Republic', 29 January 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/picking-pieces-central-african-republic>; and 'Violence closed 800 polling stations in Central African Republic', *Reuters*, 28 December 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-election-idUSKBN2921PW>.

¹²⁰ European Commission, *Handbook for European Union Election Observation*, 2nd ed. (European Union, 2008), p. 77.

¹²¹ Ana Cutter Patel, *Transitional Justice, DDR, and Security Sector Reform*, Research Brief, International Center for Transitional Justice, February 2010.

¹²² Alexander Mayer-Rieckh, *Dealing with the Past in Security Sector Reform*, SSR Paper 10 (DCAF, 2013), p. 11.

¹²³ Sophie Frediani, *The Complementarity of Transitional Justice & SSR in Addressing and Preventing Human Rights Violations: Focus on The Gambia*, DCAF Policy Paper, July 2021.

¹²⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2053, S/RES/2053 (27 June 2012).

5.3. Key findings

- **Many mandates for peace operations regularly include a gender dimension, but this is not consistent across all missions mandated to support SSR.**

For several peace operations, SSR mandates of the Security Council reliably included a gender dimension, but this was not consistent across all missions and should be true of every mandate. Moreover, the majority of mandates that incorporated gender were focused on the protection (35 mandates) and participation (36 mandates) pillars of the WPS agenda, only rarely addressing the prevention pillar (3 mandates)¹²⁵. To advance the WPS agenda and to ensure that the needs of women, girls, men, and boys are adequately met on the ground, the Security Council should consider fully integrating into all SSR mandates a gender lens that comprehensively addresses participation, prevention, and protection.

- **In relevant country-specific mandates, the link between SSR and sustaining peace is not well developed, despite its reflection in both of the UN Security Council's thematic resolutions on SSR.**

The linkages between SSR and sustaining peace should be encouraged in relevant country-specific mandates, as modelled in both of the thematic resolutions on SSR (2151 and 2553). For instance, by explicitly linking SSR to the underlying drivers of violence and conflict, mandates can contribute to more effective prevention efforts, addressing root causes rather than just symptoms. This could also support efforts to align SSR with broader peacebuilding and development goals. However, achieving this requires improved efforts to ensure that political strategies are informed by a comprehensive political economy analysis of the conflict and violence dynamics at play.

- **Mission mandates often overlook preparations for elections through SSR support, which represents a missed opportunity considering the security risks elections frequently pose.**

Even though elections regularly take place in the countries where UN missions are deployed, mission mandates rarely reference SSR support in preparation for these critical processes (with only 3 references for 2 missions out of 20). This may be because many resolutions are extended without amendment, and thus fail to adapt to evolving priorities on the ground. However, the Security Council may consider calling more frequently for SSR support aimed at securing fair elections, as the security sector can play a pivotal role in ensuring that elections are peaceful, credible, and free from interference.

- **The role of the security sector in strengthening resilience to climate-related threats has not yet been reflected in relevant discussions within the Security Council.**

The New Agenda for Peace highlights the need for the Security Council to “systematically address the peace and security implications of climate change” in relevant mandates.¹²⁶ The part the security sector can play in addressing climate-related security threats could be recognized by the Security Council, which should especially reflect on the role of the security sector in civilian protection meant to address climate-related insecurity and disasters. While the Security Council has not yet reached consensus on climate-related insecurity, promoting links between SSR and climate change in relevant open debates and country-specific discussions would help to develop a baseline consensus on language that can be used in country-specific mandates in the future, when this is likely to become a central challenge on the ground.

¹²⁵ Furthermore, the prevention pillar was addressed only in missions which ended in 2012 (UNMIT) and 2018 (UNMIL).

¹²⁶ United Nations, *A New Agenda for Peace, Our Common Agenda*, Policy Brief No. 9 (2023), p. 21

6. Key Findings and Recommendations

Security institutions play a crucial role in protecting populations and maintaining stability, including during times of conflict. They possess powerful tools to sustain peace and prevent violence, yet they can also contribute to insecurity. When the security sector is unrepresentative, abusive, or fails to protect people from security threats and human rights violations, it can fuel public grievances and even violence against the state. This underscores the vital role of SSR in sustaining peace, as highlighted in Security Council resolutions 2151 (2014) and 2553 (2020).

This Report reveals that support for SSR is regularly mandated by the UN Security Council in peace operations. In fact, 20 field operations (10 special political missions and 10 peacekeeping operations) included an SSR mandate during the period under review (2012–2022). Moreover, SSR is linked to some of the priority tasks of mission mandates, from stabilization and peace processes, to PoC and RESA. Yet, for the most part, **SSR is still seen as a technical tool in peace operations, rather than a political one that can be leveraged to advance politically-driven strategies.**

Three key takeaways have implications for Security Council mandating practices on SSR: i) SSR must be recognised as vital to sustaining peace and a core component of any mission's exit strategy; ii) SSR must be more clearly understood as a political tool and explicitly reflected as such in mission mandates; and iii) an incremental approach to adapting the language of SSR mandates should be pursued.

➤ **SSR must be recognised as vital to sustaining peace and a core component of any mission's exit strategy.**

To ensure peace operations remain a vital tool for sustaining peace, people-centered approaches must be at their core. This means that peace operations should engage with the elements of SSR support that are key in mitigating the risk of violence and ensuring the security sector can effectively protect the population.

To this end, SSR mandates should be more closely aligned with a comprehensive analysis of security sector-related risk factors for violence and underlying conflict drivers.

Additionally, efforts to strengthen good governance – emphasizing accountability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness – must be the guiding principle for SSR interventions to address the role security actors can play in exacerbating grievances. While SSR is often included in mission mandates, governance-driven approaches that enhance accountability and inclusiveness within the security sector are frequently overlooked. These approaches are often viewed as long-term initiatives and postponed until the "right" conditions arise, leading to missed opportunities to make a meaningful impact when it is most needed. By the time a transition begins, it is often too late to address these gaps. This challenge is further complicated by the fact that SSR plays a critical role in a mission's exit strategy. As such, early investment in building the foundations for good governance of the security sector is essential to ensure the national security sector can effectively assume its responsibilities. However, the review of mandates reveals that SSR is not sufficiently leveraged to contribute to this goal, as evidenced, for instance, by its limited integration in PoC priority tasks.

➤ **SSR must be more clearly understood as a political tool and explicitly reflected as such in mission mandates**

SSR efforts lie at the core of state sovereignty, targeting actors who wield significant influence over which segments of a population are protected, neglected, or even mistreated. A political perspective is thus needed when SSR is linked to advancing priority tasks in mission mandates. For instance, SSR is often tied to mandates on RESA which involve extending the security sector into new areas of a country. However, these

mandates must align with broader political objectives and be framed within a prevention lens. In contexts where the extension of the state includes deploying a security sector with a history of human rights abuses, it can cause more harm than good, potentially undermining crucial peace process goals. As such, the security sector is central to any transformative political strategy that peace operations aim to support. To that end, SSR must be understood as a political tool and reflected clearly as such in mission mandates.

However, translating this political approach into practice requires a careful balance between political engagement and technical expertise. In line with UNSCR 2151, more effort should be made to ensure that mandates outline the role SRSGs can play in providing good offices to support political agreements on SSR that align with broader political strategies; which is important to facilitating the required technical support to advance these strategies effectively. The implication is that peace operations must maintain the ability to politically engage with national counterparts on SSR, identify reform opportunities, and coordinate efforts with other relevant actors. The nature and scope of engagement should be tailored to the specific context, but at a minimum, a small SSR capacity should be in place in relevant operations to enable effective trust-building with national counterparts and ensure consistent support to SRSGs.¹²⁷

➤ **An incremental approach to adapting the language of SSR mandates should be pursued**

The mandates of peace operations tend to be path dependent; meaning that once a mandate is set, it is often renewed over subsequent years without amendment, regardless of changes on the ground. This has led to the formulation of broad mandates that give peace operations the scope to adapt to evolving circumstances, which has the advantage of making operations more flexible in real time. Yet, there is a need for more enhanced strategic direction within these broad mandates, particularly when it comes to SSR, which can encompass a vast array of activities – from human rights training for armed forces, to the establishment of human resource management structures, to initiatives designed to enhance the oversight and accountability of the security sector. Mandates that are overly broad can result in engagement that makes little difference on the ground, and leave the door open for missions to pursue limited training activities when the institutional changes that should be pursued are too daunting to undertake, particularly without adequate political engagement or resourcing.

While acknowledging the significant limits to mandating practice, penholders can play an important role in promoting minor changes to the language of mandates that signals an evolution in the strategic direction of the UN particularly during important critical junctures. For instance, if analysis shows that future elections are likely to be a stumbling block, even a broad SSR mandate can incorporate language that references this additional strategic focus, such as by stipulating support '*in the context of electoral security*'. This small addition communicates the need to focus some mission resources towards electoral security, and could undoubtedly be deleted in a mandate's next iteration when no longer relevant. Likewise, Security Council members can adopt a gradual and forward-looking approach to adapting SSR mandates in anticipation of transitions, ensuring that national authorities are empowered early on to lead their SSR processes.

¹²⁷ Vincenza Scherrer, *The Future of UN Peacekeeping: Reflections on Strengthening the Role of Peacekeeping in Sustaining Peace from a Security Sector Reform Perspective*, contribution to UN DPET's Future of Peacekeeping initiative, DCAF, December 2020.

Recommendations

While acknowledging the challenges of enhancing Security Council mandating practices, this review—analyzing over 166 UN Security Council resolutions across 20 peacekeeping and special political missions—has produced 12 recommendations, which are discussed in the report and summarized below:

- 1) **The Security Council should ensure that SSR support – which is a crucial component of a viable exit strategy – is included in relevant mandates from the outset.** While political space for SSR is often limited at the start of a mission, opportunities typically emerge over time and should be explored and expanded wherever possible. Embedding SSR early and revisiting it at critical junctures is crucial to ensuring sustainable security transitions.
- 2) **Decisions about the incorporation of SSR within priority tasks should be guided by its potential to support the mission's political strategy.** While SSR is vital for stabilization, it must not be considered only under priority tasks focused mainly on the militarized aspects of security. Instead, mandates should recognize SSR's role in fostering trust, strengthening governance, and advancing political processes that are vital to addressing the political economy of violence and conflict.
- 3) **SSR is occasionally linked to the priority task of protection of civilians (POC), but it should more consistently be considered an integral component of this task.** Even in contexts where the national security sector is a threat to civilians, it is important to recognise that the mission's exit depends on the eventual handover of protection responsibilities to that security sector. Therefore, the Council should incorporate mandates to strengthen the effectiveness and accountability of security sectors from the outset as a key contribution to PoC mandates.
- 4) **When SSR is linked to the priority task of RESA, mandates should ensure the mission also supports building accountability and inclusiveness of the security sector and considers the broader political context.** While RESA may be perceived as a technical exercise necessary for stabilization, it is a highly political undertaking in contexts where the absence of state legitimacy is a driver of conflict. When a mandate includes both the priority tasks of supporting a political process and of RESA, it is good practice to ensure that SSR is sufficiently linked to each of these tasks.
- 5) **Country-specific resolutions should refer to UN Security Council resolutions 2151 (2014) and 2553 (2020) – the thematic resolutions on SSR – to reinforce alignment with the UN's SSR principles.** This would help ensure that mandates reflect key SSR commitments, including inclusive ownership, the primacy of politics, and governance-focused approaches.
- 6) **Inclusive ownership and the development of national capacities to lead reform efforts should be established as key goals of SSR support from the outset of a mission, to better facilitate long-term transitions and ensure sustainable outcomes.** More must be done to encourage capacity-building activities that place national actors at the centre of coordinating, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating their own national reform processes, underpinned by an inclusive national vision.
- 7) **SSR should be systematically leveraged as a tool to advance political solutions to conflict.** Mandates should explicitly recognize SSR's role in supporting political and peace processes, ensuring that it not only addresses technical reforms but also actively contributes to achieving broader political objectives. Mandates should also strengthen the good offices role of SRSGs in advancing SSR, particularly in contexts where embedding SSR within political processes can promote a more equitable distribution of power and resources, thereby contributing to preventing future conflict.
- 8) **Mission mandates should more consistently incorporate clear language on governance-driven reforms that promote effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness.** While building political commitment to long-term governance reforms can be challenging, it is essential for missions to address this if they aim to engage

meaningfully in the areas that matter most. This includes prioritizing issues such as independent oversight, civil society engagement, and effective financial management.

- 9) **The integration of a gender perspective in SSR mandates should be more consistent across all missions.** While some Security Council mandates have incorporated a gender dimension in relation to SSR this has not been systematic. Every SSR-related mandate should explicitly address gender considerations, ensuring alignment with the WPS agenda. This includes a focus on the three key pillars of protection, participation, and prevention to enhance the effectiveness and inclusiveness of SSR efforts.
- 10) **The linkages between SSR and sustaining peace should be encouraged in relevant country-specific mandates, as modelled in both of the thematic resolutions on SSR (2151 and 2553).** Mandates that link SSR to security-related risk factors for violence and the underlying drivers of conflict can contribute to a more effective approach to addressing prevention needs. This also underscores the broader need for political strategies to be based on a thorough political economy analysis of the conflict and violence dynamics.
- 11) **Given the security risk that elections can represent, mission mandates should prepare more proactively for elections through SSR mandates.** Elections commonly take place in countries where UN missions are deployed, and yet it is rare that mandates explicitly reference SSR in support of these critical processes. SSR can help ensure the security and neutrality of security actors during elections, preventing the abuse of power and protecting the democratic process, while also fostering trust in the institutions that oversee elections.
- 12) **While the Security Council has yet to reach consensus on climate-related insecurity, the role of the security sector in enhancing resilience to climate-related threats should be highlighted in relevant discussions.** Strengthening the connection between SSR and climate change in relevant discussions would help establish a common understanding and consensus language that can be used in future country-specific mandates when climate-related challenges are likely to become more prominent.

Looking Ahead

In the wake of the *Pact for the Future* and growing calls to rethink peace operations, there will be increased pressure to streamline mission mandates and advance modular approaches to peace operations.¹²⁸ Because SSR is a long-term process, there is often a tendency to view it as something that can be deferred to a later stage. Yet, in line with a people-centred approach, any support that can help mitigate the risk of violence and conflict should be prioritized. This includes ensuring that security sectors have the capacity to protect populations, are held accountable, and do not contribute to further grievances that could fuel violence. Delaying SSR until the “right” conditions emerge risks missing crucial opportunities to make a meaningful impact when it matters most. By prioritizing SSR early on, missions can lay the groundwork for sustainable peace, strengthening security sectors in ways that contribute to long-term peace and security.

¹²⁸ El-Ghassim Wane, Prof. Paul D. Williams, Prof. Ai Kihara-Hunt, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities*, Independent Study commissioned by the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024.

SSR mandates in UN peace operations ¹²⁹ - 2012-2022	BINUCA	BINUH	BNUB	MINUJUSTH	MINUSCA	MINUSMA	MINUSTAH	MONUSCO	UNAMA	UNAMI	UNAMID	UNIOGBIS	UNIPSIL	UNITAMS	UNMIL	UNMISS	UNMIT	UNOCI	UNSMIL	UNSOM
Objectives of support – Main principles of SSR																				
Inclusive national ownership								✓				✓			✓			✓	✓	✓
Primacy of politics in SSR	✓				✓			✓					✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
Governance focused approach		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Policy, legal and/or constitutional framework</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
<i>Independent oversight</i>			✓		✓				✓								✓			
<i>Multi-level system of governance</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
<i>Effective management system & internal oversight</i>		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓						✓			✓		
<i>Other (unspecified governance)</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓			✓	✓
Additional objectives of mandated support																				
Culture of service		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Building security and justice architecture		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Integration into the security sector					✓	✓		✓		✓									✓	
International coordination of SSR support					✓	✓		✓				✓								
Mechanisms for interaction among security actors					✓			✓									✓			
Swiss thematic priorities in the context of UN SC tenure (2023-2024)																				
Building Sustainable Peace								✓			✓							✓		✓
Protection of civilians					✓			✓	✓		✓			✓		✓				
Climate change																				
WPS Agenda/Gender equality		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
SDGs																				
Elections								✓							✓					
Transitional justice								✓												

¹²⁹ Some mandates including broad, generic calls for SSR support are not covered in this table, as the focus is on analyzing trends in the principles, objectives, and thematic focus of SSR mandates.

About DCAF

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.

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www.dcaf.ch

DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

Chemin Eugène Rigot 2E
1202 Geneva - Switzerland

+41 (0) 22 730 94 00

info@dcaf.ch

