

# The Security Sector

Roles and responsibilities in security provision, management and oversight

### About this series

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

### About this SSR Backgrounder

This SSR Backgrounder is about the security sector. The “security sector” is a relatively new term that refers to the actors involved in the provision, management and oversight of security in a country. But this simple definition leaves room for different perspectives on which security actors are considered part of the security sector in each national context, and these differences shape approaches to SSG and SSR. This SSR Backgrounder explains different perspectives on the security sector in terms of the roles and responsibilities of security actors in good SSG.

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### Who is part of the security sector?

The security sector is composed of all the structures, institutions and personnel responsible for security provision, management and oversight at national and local levels. The security sector includes both actors that use force and those responsible for controlling how force is used through management and oversight: these actors are **state security providers** and those responsible for **security management and oversight**, which includes **civil society**. From the point of view of good SSG, the role of the security sector is to provide for state and human security. There are different definitions of the security sector: the narrowest include only state security institutions, while the more common definitions are more comprehensive, including all the state and non-state actors that influence security and justice within a state. Figure 1 shows a comprehensive definition of the security sector (for narrower definitions see Figure 3).

### Why focus on the whole security sector instead of on either national defence or domestic law enforcement?

Conventionally, security institutions distinguished between external and internal security, and between national security and public safety. Military capabilities for external aggression and defence were considered separate from and largely unrelated to domestic security, public safety or law and order. This began to change as state-centric understandings of security moved towards a more people-centred vision of human security.

Several factors showed that it makes sense to consider both internal and external security, military and non-military, national and domestic, and state and non-state security provision together as a single area of service provision and public responsibility.

- Human security highlighted the importance of a secure state that can offer security to its diverse population.
- Development actors argued that state security institutions of all kinds should be held to the same public management and accountability standards as other parts of the public sector.
- Changes in international security blurred the distinctions between internal and external security mandates.

### ► Good security sector governance (SSG)

Good SSG describes how the principles of good governance apply to security provision, management and oversight by state and non-state actors. The principles of good governance are accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency. Good SSG means that the security sector provides state and human security, effectively and accountably, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights. Good SSG is a specific type of security governance based on a normative standard for how the state security sector should work in a democracy.

For more information on SSG, please refer to the SSR Backgrounders on “Security Sector Governance” and “Gender Equality and Good Security Sector Governance”.

- Recognition of the interlinkages between subsectors of state security provision, and state and non-state security actors, showed the need for a holistic understanding of security provision, management and oversight.

As a result of these factors, **the idea of the security sector emerged as a more comprehensive perspective on how the state provides for its own security and that of individuals and communities of all backgrounds**. The term “security sector” was inspired by new public management approaches to public service delivery, but the term “security system” has also been used to make the same point that security provision involves many interconnected actors and must be considered holistically.

**Figure 1 A comprehensive definition of the security sector**



Based on: SSR in nutshell, ISSAT (2012: 4)

### Who are the state security providers?

State security providers are the security institutions established by the state and authorized to use force on behalf of the state. The use of force includes the threat to use force and the limitation of certain basic rights under specific circumstances defined by law.

Every security sector is different, but typical state security providers include, among others:

- armed forces, such as the army, navy, air forces, coastguards and other military and auxiliary formations;
- public law enforcement, such as police, gendarmerie and auxiliary policing forces;
- executive protection forces, such as presidential guards or close protection units;
- intelligence services, both military and civilian, foreign and domestic;
- border guards and customs authorities;
- reserves and local security units, civil defence forces, national guards, civil protection and emergency formations, and commercial security providers contracted by the state.

The list of state security providers will be different in every national context – for example, not all states have military forces or gendarmeries – but all state security providers are included in every definition of the security sector.

**But there is more to the security sector than state security providers.** The narrowest possible definition of the security sector that is compatible with the concept of good SSG also includes the state structures, institutions and personnel responsible for the management and oversight of security provision.

### Who is responsible for security sector management and oversight?

Good SSG requires that security provision is managed and overseen within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights. Within such a framework, accountability is provided through internal and external supervision of security providers. The tools and mechanisms for supervision must be based on clear responsibilities, a transparent process and responsiveness to the public.

A range of state and non-state actors are involved in security sector management and oversight (see Figure 2).

Typical roles and responsibilities in internal and external oversight include the following.

- **State security providers** use internal oversight procedures to hold their personnel to high standards of service delivery, including for example internal disciplinary systems, supervision and performance reviews throughout the chain of command. They also submit to inspection by independent, external security sector management and oversight institutions.
- **The executive** (government, head of government and/or state) has final say on security policy and controls the security services through a system of executive management and administration, often including coordinating bodies, such as national security councils or advisers. The executive is held accountable for its decisions chiefly through an elected parliament or legislature, and sometimes regular direct elections, but also through judicial review, media scrutiny, and public consultation and debate.
- **Government ministries** manage the administration, organization and budget of the security forces on behalf of the executive, providing the necessary resources to implement policy. Ministries also provide a layer of political separation between the security forces and the last instance of political authority (often the head of state): depending on context, this may involve, for example, ministries of defence, interior, justice or finance, among others.

- The **parliament or legislature** and its specialized committees legislate on security matters; scrutinize, amend and approve budgets for the security sector; oversee the performance of the sector in implementing security policy; investigate the activities of the security forces; provide a public forum for political parties to deliberate on security policy and activities; and seek civil society input on security affairs.
- **Justice authorities**, both civilian and military, play a role in security sector oversight by ensuring the security forces uphold domestic and international law in the exercise of their duties: for example by supervising the use of special powers through decisions about the legality of warrants, investigations, surveillance methods or searches, among others, and by holding security personnel accountable for violating the law. Justice sector actors also ensure that security policy and the actions of the government and the security forces conform to the established norms of constitutional order: for example, when courts with constitutional jurisdiction test the legality of new laws or policies.
- **Special statutory institutions** are state bodies that are legally and politically independent of the government: for example, human rights commissions, independent complaints authorities, ombuds-institutions, anti-corruption commissions, supreme audit offices, and customary or traditional authorities where they have a statutory mandate. These organizations receive public complaints and investigate, report on and sometimes make binding recommendations about issues specific to their mandates.
- **Individuals, the media and civil society organizations** engage in research, debate and advocacy among other activities, and may be critical or supportive of the security services and the government's security policy. Their interest in ensuring high standards of public and state security provision makes them an integral part of the security sector.

**Figure 2** A range of actors are involved in security sector oversight and management



### Is the justice sector part of the security sector?

There are different ways to define the justice sector, but the broadest definition includes all the agencies and actors, both state and non-state, involved in the provision, management and oversight of justice:

- the judiciary, defence and prosecution, and court personnel, including military justice systems;
- government ministries, specialized parliamentary committees and special oversight institutions responsible for the administration and oversight of the justice system;
- legal professionals and associated training organizations;
- law enforcement agencies;
- prisons and corrections agencies responsible for carrying out sentences;
- the public and civil society actors with a stake in high standards of justice provision;
- informal and customary justice providers.

The justice sector contributes to state and human security in two distinct ways.

1. **The justice sector contributes to security by upholding the rule of law:** justice institutions – both military and civilian – uphold and enforce the rule of law through prosecution, trials and sentencing. Justice institutions are integral to the work of security institutions, in particular the police.
2. **The justice sector provides security sector oversight:** justice sector authorities rule on the constitutional legality of laws governing the security sector, and the lawfulness of the behaviour of security sector personnel. Justice institutions also protect the legal rights of service personnel and prevent political manipulation of the security sector.

► **Security sector reform (SSR)** SSR is the political and technical process of improving state and human security by making security provision, management and oversight more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights. The goal of SSR is to apply the principles of good governance to the security sector. SSR concerns all actors involved in security provision, management and oversight, and covers all their roles, responsibilities and actions. SSR programmes may focus primarily on only one security actor or on the way the entire system functions, as long as the goal is always to improve both effectiveness and accountability. Efforts to improve the efficiency or effectiveness of the security sector cannot be considered SSR if they do not enhance civilian democratic control, rule of law and respect for human rights.

For more information on SSR, please refer to the SSR Backgrounders on “Security Sector Reform” and “Gender Equality and Security Sector Reform”.

Because of the close links between justice and security institutions, **comprehensive definitions of the security sector include all or part of the justice sector.** In contrast, narrower definitions include only oversight or criminal law enforcement. Regardless of which justice sector actors are included in the formal definition of the security sector, it is important to account for the links between security and justice in a holistic approach to SSR. For more information on the justice sector and good SSG, please see the SSR Backgrounder on “The Justice Sector”.

### Are non-state security and justice providers part of the security sector?

**The state is not the only provider of security and justice:** people often act to provide for security and justice in their own homes and communities, regardless of whether the state acts to meet these needs or not. People organize to provide their own security in many different ways, including, for example, self-defence groups, neighbourhood watches, women's groups, and through commercial security provision, among others.

**Even where the state does provide for security and justice, people may still preserve alternative security and justice practices** based on customary principles, or local traditions and beliefs, because of high levels of local legitimacy: this can include, for example, customary roles for important community figures in security and justice decision-making; alternative dispute resolution mechanisms; and rituals, traditions or informal rules that affect security and justice in the community. In some states certain security functions conventionally carried out by public security forces have been outsourced to commercial security providers.

Non-state security and justice providers have a direct effect on SSG at the local level, but they are only included in broader definitions of the security sector because their relationship to state authority and state security providers is not always clear. In some cases, non-state security and justice providers (especially commercial non-state actors) may have a formal or semi-formal status under the law, in which case they are included in narrower definitions of the security sector as state security providers. **Whether or not non-state security and justice providers are included in the security sector depends on the national context, but in all cases it is important to consider non-state security providers in a holistic approach to SSR and to account for their role in security sector oversight.**

### Are commercial security providers part of the security sector?

Commercial security providers are businesses that sell their services in the protection of people and property, and are sometimes known as private military or security companies. They operate on a commercial basis; their goals are not political or criminal; and they do not have any special status according to community, customary or traditional authority. Their existence is regulated by the state and at the international level, and such companies have some kind of formal legal status that allows them to practise their profession legitimately. The number of commercial security providers in a town or country can be much greater than the number of state security personnel, and they may be better equipped and better trained than state security providers. **Commercial security providers supply private security services unless they are contracted by states to supply public security. But even their legitimate activities in private security provision can affect public security and therefore SSG.** For this reason, they are included in broad definitions of the security sector as either security providers or civil society actors.

### Are armed non-state actors part of the security sector?

In contrast to commercial security providers, armed non-state actors use force to achieve political or criminal goals outside the remit of state control. They can include criminal or political organizations, such as guerrilla fighters, insurgents, rebels, liberation armies, organized crime groups, political party militia and terrorists, among others. The activities of armed non-state actors are often illegitimate and illegal from the point of view of the state, although they may be legitimate in the eyes of their supporters. **Although their political status is subjective, the use of force by armed non-state actors can affect public and national security for all people and the state, and for this reason they are included in the very broadest definitions of the security sector.** The goal of SSR is to bring the use of force under legitimate state control within a framework of rule of law and respect for human rights. This involves disarming non-state armed actors and, depending on the situation, bringing them before the law. Including armed non-state actors in the definition of the security sector remains a controversial issue, in particular because of fears that recognizing their impact on security may confer indirect political legitimacy.

### Are external actors part of the security sector?

External actors sometimes have an important impact on security within a state, whether as occupying troops, peacekeeping forces, commercial actors or allies offering assistance. In post-conflict contexts, external actors may have a disproportionately important impact on security and SSR, because foreign forces may provide security in an unstable situation and external assistance plays a large part in post-conflict peacebuilding, including SSR. For these reasons, external actors may be included in broad definitions of the security sector, especially in post-conflict contexts. In reform contexts where there is little or no external involvement, external actors are usually not considered part of the security sector.

### Why is SSR based on broader definitions of the security sector?

Because SSR focuses on improving both effectiveness and accountability, it can only be based on a definition of the security sector that includes all the institutions and personnel responsible for security provision, management and oversight. Most definitions of the security sector also include the state justice system, because of its role in upholding rule of law. Figure 3 shows that SSR can be based on a variety of broad and narrow definitions of the security sector but **definitions of the security sector that focus only on state security providers while excluding security oversight and management are not compatible with SSR.**

Focusing on state-based security provision, oversight and management is only the narrowest definition of the security sector compatible with SSR. Broader definitions of the sector are more comprehensive and recognize the reality that non-state actors influence how security services are delivered by the state. **Broadening the definition of the security sector to include all actors involved in security provision – both state and non-state, legal and illegal – provides a clearer and more accurate picture of the actual security dynamics that affect state and human security.**

Basing SSR on the broadest definition of the sector does not legitimize armed non-state actors, but does allow for more realistic reforms that restore state responsibility for security provision within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights: the goal of including armed non-state actors in the security sector is always to eliminate abuses and enhance state and human security.



**Figure 3** Narrower and broader definitions of the security sector

Not compatible with SSR	Narrowest	Narrow	Broad	Broader	Broadest
<p>State security providers only e.g. police, armed forces, intelligence, etc.</p>	<p>State security providers AND security oversight and management bodies, including civil society and justice institutions involved in oversight e.g. parliaments, ministries, courts, ombuds-institutions, women's groups, academia, media, among others.</p> <p>State justice institutions closely linked to security provision e.g. actors in criminal justice or entire justice sector.</p> <p>Non-state security and justice providers e.g. commercial security providers, community security groups, customary justice providers.</p> <p>External actors supporting national SSR efforts e.g. in transition or post-conflict contexts.</p> <p>Armed non-state actors e.g. armed groups that use force to achieve political or criminal goals outside the remit of state control, including criminal or political organizations.</p>				

## Further resources

*For a description of SSR according to different elements of the security sector:*

- OECD Development Assistance Committee  
**Section 7: Implementing SSR Sector by Sector**  
in OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007, pp. 112-235.)

*For a description of the different elements of the security sector with respect to gender and SSR:*

- Megan Bastick and Kristin Valasek (eds)  
**Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit**  
(Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN-INSTRAW, 2008).

*For more on the distinctive roles and responsibilities of some state security providers:*

- Albrecht Schnabel and Marc Krupanski  
**Mapping Evolving Internal Roles of the Armed Forces**  
SSR Paper 7 (Geneva: DCAF, 2012).
- Derek Lutterbeck  
**The Paradox of Gendarmeries: Between Expansion, Demilitarization and Dissolution**  
SSR Paper 8 (Geneva: DCAF, 2013).

*For a more detailed guide to the role of parliaments and legislatures in the security sector:*

- Hans Born and Marc Bentinck  
**Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector**  
(Brussels: European Parliament-OPPD, 2013).
- Teodora Fuior  
**Parliamentary Powers in Security Sector Governance**  
(Geneva: DCAF, 2011).

- Hans Born, Philipp Fluri and Anders Johnsson (eds)  
**Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector: Principles, Mechanisms and Practices**  
Handbook For Parliamentarians 5  
(Geneva: DCAF, 2003).  
This publication is available in 37 languages other than English at [www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch)

*For more a detailed guide to the roles and responsibilities of civil society organizations in the security sector:*

- Eden Cole, Kerstin Eppert and Katrin Kinzelbach (eds)  
**Public Oversight of the Security Sector: A Handbook for Civil Society Organizations**  
(Bratislava: UNDP, 2008).

*On aspects of commercial security provision and the security sector:*

- Anne-Marie Buzatu and Benjamin S. Buckland  
**Private Military and Security Companies: Future Challenges in Security Governance**  
Horizon 2015 Working Paper Series 3  
(Geneva: DCAF, 2010).

## More DCAF SSR resources

- DCAF publishes a wide variety of tools, handbooks and guidance on all aspects of SSR and good SSG, available free-for-download at [www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch)  
Many resources are also available in languages other than English.
- The DCAF-ISSAT Community of Practice website makes available a range of online learning resources for SSR practitioners at <http://issat.dcaf.ch>

The **Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)** is an international foundation whose mission is to assist the international community in pursuing good governance and reform of the security sector. DCAF develops and promotes norms and standards, conducts tailored policy research, identifies good practices and recommendations to promote democratic security sector governance, and provides in-country advisory support and practical assistance programmes.

**DCAF wishes to thank**

Petra Gurtner for production and design;  
Cherry Ekins for copy editing in English;  
Lynda Chenaf for copy editing in French;  
Linda Machata for translation into French; and  
Fernando Colaço for app development.

**Series editor**

Fairlie Chappuis

**To cite this publication**

Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, "The Security Sector", SSR Backgrounder Series (Geneva: DCAF, 2015).

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