

# Gender and Security Sector Reform

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**What is security sector reform?**

**What is gender?**

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Geneva Centre for the  
Democratic Control  
of Armed Forces

This document is part of the DCAF Backgrounder series, which provides practitioners with concise introductions to a variety of issues in the field of Security Sector Governance and Security Sector Reform.

**What is security sector reform?**

Security sector reform (SSR) is generally defined as a process of transforming the security sector to strengthen accountability, effectiveness and respect for human rights and the rule of law. The security sector is a broad term used to describe the structures, institutions and personnel responsible for the management, provision and oversight of security in a country (see the DCAF Backgrounder on Security Sector Governance and Reform for more information).

**What is gender?**

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, identities and relationships of men and women. While “sex” refers to biological differences between females and males, “gender” is not determined by biology, but learned. Men and women are taught different roles and behaviours depending on their sex. For example, in many cultures, men are traditionally responsible for car repairs and women for food preparation. However, men are not biologically predestined to be mechanics, nor are women predestined to be cooks; rather, those roles are taught to them by society.

Gender roles are not static, but change over time and vary widely within and across cultures. Moreover, they are influenced by many different factors in addition to culture, such as socio-economic realities, class, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation and age. As a result of their gender roles, men, women, girls and boys face different insecurities (see Box 1 on page 2).

**Why is gender important to security sector reform?**

SSR policymakers and practitioners increasingly recognise that the integration of gender issues into security sector reform programmes contributes to the operational effectiveness of security sector institutions. This is particularly important for the following reasons.

**Effective service delivery.** Women, men, girls and boys have different security experiences and priorities. Taking these differences into account when reforming the security sector strengthens the ability of security sector institutions to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and respond to the security needs of the public (see Box 1).

### Box 1. The threat of gender-based violence (GBV)

Certain forms of insecurity and violence are based on gender. GBV is not only violence against women and girls; men and boys can also be victims. GBV is one of the greatest threats to human security worldwide. For example, globally, one out of every three women is a victim of this type of violence. GBV has several different forms.

- **Domestic violence.** Depending on the country, between 15 and 71% of women are victims of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. The percentage of women who report sexual abuse by a partner ranges from a low of 6% in Japan, Montenegro and Serbia to 59% in Ethiopia. Domestic violence also affects men but information on male victims is scant.
- **Gun violence.** Globally, 1,000 people are killed, and 3,000 people are injured by guns every day. Over 90 per cent of firearm casualties are male.
- **Sexual violence.** Worldwide, women, men and children experience sexual violence - often unreported due to the victim's fear of stigma.
- **Other forms** of GBV include anti-gay violence, female genital mutilation, rape, child abuse and some forms of trafficking in human beings.

**Representation.** Representative security sector institutions that mirror society at large in terms of ethnicity, tribal affiliation, religion, sex and language

tend to be more trusted and legitimate. However, men continue to be vastly over-represented in security sector institutions (see the information provided by the UN and NATO in Tables 1 and 2). This is particularly true of the police, military and intelligence services and the ministries they are responsible to, as well as parliaments (male parliamentarians hold an average of 82% of seats worldwide). In October 2008, 98% of military staff on UN peacekeeping operations were men. When women are represented in these institutions, they are often relegated to low status or entry-level positions.

Women and men have the right to equal opportunities to participate in security delivery, decision-making and oversight (see Box 3). The increased participation of women in security sector institutions is desirable and viable; it is also operationally beneficial. For instance, in peacekeeping operations, women are needed to screen female ex-combatants, widen the net of intelligence gathering, perform searches of women and assist in the aftermath of sexual violence.

**Respect for human rights.** Security sector personnel that respect the human rights of their colleagues and civilians create a healthy and effective work environment, and gain the trust of the community. Security sector institutions, such as the armed forces, are notorious for high rates of sexual harassment. For example, in 2006, the UK Ministry of Defence published an independent study that revealed that over two thirds of all servicewomen had been sexually harassed. In many countries, as documented for example in UN reports and on websites such

**Table 1: Men in the police service**

Country	% Men
Bangladesh (2006)	98.7
Canada (2006)	81.4
El Salvador (2006)	93.0
India (2006)	97.6
Italy (2006)	99.6
Portugal (2006)	93.1
Sierra Leone (2006)	84.0
South Africa (2008)	69.5
Sweden (2006)	79.4
Timor Leste (2007)	81.0

**Table 2: Men in the armed forces**

Country	% Men
Austria (2006)	98.3
Bangladesh (2006)	99.6
Brazil (2006)	96.5
Finland (2006)	75.7
Kenya (2006)	96.3
Latvia (2007)	77.0
Poland (2007)	99.0
Turkey (2006)	96.9
USA (2006)	89.5
Zambia (2006)	76.7

as those of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, security sector personnel have also been involved in sexual assault, human trafficking, forced prostitution and domestic violence against female civilians. Measures to prevent and respond to violations of human rights need, therefore, to be incorporated into SSR processes. These can include codes of conduct, sexual harassment policies and independent oversight and complaints mechanisms.

**Local ownership.** The involvement of women and women's organisations in SSR processes is an essential part of effective local ownership. Women's civil society organisations and organisations working on gender issues are important local security actors, as they provide services to victims, liaise with security sector institutions and work to prevent insecurity. They often have access to detailed information regarding local security and justice needs, and can serve as a bridge between communities and security policymakers.

**Oversight and accountability.** The equal participation of men and women in oversight bodies, such as parliament, ombudsperson institutions, civil society organisations and the judiciary, builds trust and strengthens responsiveness to the concerns of the entire population. Involving gender experts and women's organisations in oversight bodies is also essential if human rights abuses committed by security sector personnel are to be prevented, or failing that, punished.

### How can gender issues be integrated into security sector reform processes and institutions?

Two complementary strategies can be used.

**Gender mainstreaming** is a strategy for making women's and men's specific concerns and experiences integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SSR policies and programmes so that women and men benefit equally.

**Measures to promote the equal participation of men and women** seek to uphold the right of men and women to participate in decision-making on

SSR and on security more generally. As women are under-represented in SSR processes and security sector institutions, such measures should focus on enhancing the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women, and on encouraging the participation of civil society organisations led by women and responsive to their concerns.

#### Box 2. Transitional justice and sexual violence in Sierra Leone

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was established in 2002 with a mandate to "try persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law during the war."

Many positive steps have been taken by the Special Court to ensure that crimes of sexual violence are adequately addressed, including:

- developing a prosecution strategy that incorporates scrutiny of crimes of sexual violence
- assigning experienced female investigators to investigate crimes of sexual violence
- adopting gender-sensitive interview methods to reduce victims' stress when reporting crimes.

These gender-sensitive working methods have led to positive results. The first judgement of the Court, delivered on 20 June 2007, included convictions for rape and sexual slavery as crimes against humanity.

### What are some of the key entry-points for gender in SSR?

There are many different entry-points for the integration of gender into SSR. As all SSR processes are unique, the following suggestions need to be adapted to specific country contexts.

**Assessment.** Gender can be integrated into SSR assessments. This can increase their accuracy and relevance by determining the specific security and justice needs and roles of men, women, girls and boys. Assessment teams should include both women and men, including staff with gender expertise. Specific methods used may include women-only and men-only focus groups, and data disaggregated by sex and age.

**Security policies and protocols.** National peace, development, security and defence policies that are gender-sensitive are more comprehensive and effective. Participatory policymaking processes

that include consultations with women's ministries, women's organisations or parliamentary gender caucuses help ensure that policies are drafted in gender-sensitive language and include appropriate gender content.

**Staffing.** Personnel policies can be designed to foster representative security sector institutions in which men and women participate at all levels of decision-making.

**Recruitment.** The recruitment of female personnel for service in the security sector can be increased through a combination of initiatives: establishing targets for increasing the number of women in employment; making job descriptions, recruitment materials and hiring processes gender-sensitive; hiring female recruitment officers and distributing information on job opportunities through media popular with women or in places where women congregate; vetting of both male and female recruits to ensure that they are not guilty of human rights violations, including GBV.

**Retention.** Specific initiatives are necessary to ensure that security sector institutions are good employers for women. A zero-tolerance policy on workplace discrimination, sexual harassment and violence should be fully implemented, and men and women should be guaranteed equal pay, benefits, pensions and other remuneration. Mentoring programmes for junior female staff, female staff associations and family-friendly human resources policies and practices are also essential.

**Promotion.** Women often lack career advancement opportunities and remain in low-status positions. This situation can be reversed with transparent and non-discriminatory promotion criteria and job assessment standards, lateral entry schemes and increased access to training for career development.

**Training.** Gender training can help improve the workplace environment, personnel effectiveness and delivery of security and justice services. It is important to integrate gender issues into all relevant training programmes, in addition to providing specific training on such issues as human rights, sexual harassment policies and protocols on trafficking in human beings.

### Box 3: United Nations Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security

There are several international and regional laws, instruments and norms concerning security and gender (see the Annex to the DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR and UN-INSTRAW Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit: <http://www.dcaf.ch/gssrtoolkit>) that require a gender responsive approach to the security sector.

Prominent among such instruments are UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (adopted in 2000) and 1820 (adopted in 2008) on women, peace and security, which stress the importance of women's "equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security" (1325) and demand "the immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians" (1820).

Security Council Resolutions 1888 and 1889 of 2009 complement and strengthen Resolutions 1325 and 1820. Resolution 1888 calls for new measures to address sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, such as the inclusion of sexual violence issues into DDR and SSR arrangements, vetting of armed and security forces and justice processes. Resolution 1889 re-emphasises the importance of women's participation in peace processes and of developing concrete strategies to address women's needs in post-conflict situations.

These Resolutions also call for:

- Member States to ensure the increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions, and in mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict (1325)
- all actors involved in peace agreements to include the protection of and respect for the human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary (1325)
- those involved in planning DDR programmes to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants (1325)
- UN-assisted justice and SSR efforts to consult with women and women-led organisations to develop effective mechanisms to protect women and girls from violence, in particular sexual violence (1820)
- investigation and punishment of sexual violence committed by civilians or by military personnel (1888)
- legal and judicial reform to ensure justice for survivors of sexual violence (1888)
- the inclusion of sexual violence issues into all stages of peace processes (1888)
- Member States to enhance women's engagement in political and economic decision-making in recovery processes (1889)

**Institutional structures.** Structural reforms may be necessary to address the diverse security needs of men, women, girls and boys. Potential reforms include establishing gender units, focal points, or advisors (see Box 5 on page 6 for an example). Other mechanisms such as ombudsperson institutions, equal opportunity directorates and inter-departmental cooperation mechanisms are also essential. The women's police stations and domestic violence units that have been created in a number of countries help victims of violence by encouraging cooperation among specially trained police officers and health and social workers, as well as legal and other specialists.

**Operations.** Security institutions also need to mainstream gender considerations in their operations. Including gender advisors, focal points or experts in operational planning helps to address gender concerns prior to deployment. Gender-balanced teams, especially in operations requiring interaction with communities, can also contribute to understanding community priorities and to engaging civilians in constructive dialogue.

**Logistics and infrastructure.** At a basic level, female security sector staff requires access to properly fitted uniforms and equipment. Separate facilities, for example, bathrooms and barracks, may also be necessary.

**Oversight.** Appointing women and gender experts to oversight bodies, such as parliamentary committees, ombudsperson institutions, human rights commissions and the judiciary, helps these institutions be representative and responsive to gender concerns. Consultation with women's civil society organisations can also facilitate oversight on such issues as sexual exploitation and abuse, and equal representation.

### What are the key challenges for the integration of gender issues?

The following are some of the priority challenges involved in integrating gender issues into SSR programming.

**Discrimination and stereotypes.** Often women are prevented from joining security sector institutions

or making a career in these institutions. The cultural stereotyping of security and justice provision as a job for men means that female security sector personnel can face disapproval by their family and community, and discrimination by their colleagues.

#### Box 4. Nicaragua's gender-responsive police reform

Reforms of the Nicaraguan police were initiated in the 1990s, following pressure from the Nicaraguan women's movement and from women within the police. Reform initiatives have included:

- training modules on GBV in the police academy curriculum
- creation of women's police stations
- a Gender Consultative Council as a forum for discussion and investigation of the working conditions of female officers
- review of recruitment criteria for entering the police force with a view to improving female access (e.g., adjusted physical exercise requirements)
- family-friendly human resource policies and
- transparent promotion criteria

According to a Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit publication, these reforms have produced extremely positive results: for example, in 2006, 26 per cent of Nicaraguan police officers were women, the highest proportion of female police officers of any national police force in the world. Nicaragua's police service has also been described as the most "women-friendly" in the region and has regained legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the general public.

**GBV not seen as a security threat.** Despite the high prevalence and devastating effects of GBV, security policies and institutions rarely take adequate measures in response. In some cases, this is due to the perception that GBV is a private matter rather than a crime and a human rights violation. In other cases, state security issues, such as terrorism, are prioritised over threats to human security.

**Lack of understanding.** Lack of understanding of the importance of gender issues may result in their being deprioritised on the security and justice agendas.

**Shortcomings in the educational system.** Due to discrimination against girls at schools and at universities in many countries, women may lack the educational requirements to join security sector institutions.

### **Weak oversight and accountability mechanisms.**

This can lead to impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations and discrimination among security sector personnel, and to inadequate disincentives to discourage further abuse.

#### **Box 5. Integrating gender into Swedish peacekeeping missions**

In 2006, the Swedish armed forces contributed to the European Union military operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (EUFOR RD Congo). This was the first EUFOR mission to take gender issues and the implementation of UNSCR 1325 into account in a structured manner by foreseeing a gender advisor to the operational commander.

The advisor trained EUFOR forces on integrating gender issues into their activities and informed local NGOs and women's groups of EUFOR objectives and activities. EUFOR also established a network of gender focal points in regional EUFOR units.

The work of the gender advisor resulted in:

- enhanced gender awareness training for 250 EUFOR staff and the distribution of (and training on the use of) a Soldier's Card that included a section on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse
- prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse training for some 75 EUFOR personnel
- special training for EUFOR female personnel, which also improved their chances of participating in patrols
- collaboration with local women's groups, who provided input into EUFOR's work, resulting in an improvement of the organisation's image amongst women's organisations as well as the development of psychological, medical and legal support resources for victims of sexual violence
- a collection of lessons learned, useful for mainstreaming gender issues in future peacebuilding operations

### **How does context influence gender and SSR?**

Just as SSR processes vary from country to country and from context to context, so do gender challenges and opportunities. Here are some examples that highlight key problems in various contexts, whereby it should be stressed that none of these problems are unique to a particular context.

**Post-conflict countries.** Gender roles undergo change during conflict, as men and women take on new responsibilities. This change opens up

opportunities for the greater involvement of women in decision-making, including within security institutions. At the same time, pressure to provide stability, security and justice may result in the neglect of gender issues in recruitment, training and logistics. Opportunities for integrating gender into SSR increase with the participation of women's organisations in peace negotiations, donor conferences and other reconstruction planning processes. All security personnel should be vetted for human rights violations, including GBV, and provided with extensive gender training. Moreover, DDR processes can present opportunities to close the gender gap if, for example, female ex-combatants are given the opportunity to join security sector institutions.

**Transitional countries.** The security sector in transitional countries is often characterised by a lack of accountability mechanisms, corruption and low levels of public trust. Gender issues are rarely addressed as SSR processes tend to focus on modernisation, counter-corruption and human rights violations. However, national participation in peacekeeping missions and in international cooperation on human trafficking can generate greater awareness of the need for female security sector personnel. At the same time, many women in transitional countries have high levels of education, which opens further opportunities for their inclusion in security institutions.

**Developing countries.** Developing countries often suffer from a dearth of resources and oversight, endemic corruption and a legislative and judicial framework that is inadequate for prosecuting GBV. Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for integrating gender into SSR programmes. Initiatives focusing on good governance or justice and security provision are entry points for increasing the access and participation of women. In particular, the involvement of women's organisations in poverty reduction strategies and donor conferences often helps mainstream gender concerns.

**Developed countries.** Developed countries still have far to go in effectively preventing and responding to GBV, and in ensuring equal opportunities for women's participation in the security sector. However, the anti-discrimination,

anti-hate crime and gender equality laws that exist in many developed countries can serve as foundations for building the capacity of security sector institutions to address gender issues. In many countries, the legislative framework also supports the participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people within the security sector. Moreover, developed countries usually have more robust oversight bodies that can provide entry-points for addressing gender issues. Developed countries are key actors in supporting the integration of gender into SSR programmes for partner countries, which can also have a beneficial impact on the development of their own gender policies.

### Further information

DCAF Gender and Security Programme

<http://www.dcaf.ch/gender-security-sector-reform/>

DCAF Gender & SSR Training Resource Package

<http://www.gssrtraining.ch>

The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)

<http://www.iansa.org/>

International Alert

<http://www.international-alert.org/>

OSCE/ODIHR

<http://www.osce.org/odihr>

UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Background Paper. Enhancing the Operational Impact of Peacekeeping Operations: Gender Balance in Military and Police Services Deployed to UN Peacekeeping Missions (New York: UNDPKO, 2006),

[http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Peacekeeping/DPKO/women\\_in\\_peacekeeping.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Peacekeeping/DPKO/women_in_peacekeeping.pdf)

UN-INSTRAW Gender and SSR

<http://www.un-instraw.org/en/gps/general/gender-and-security-sector-rform-5.html>

UNIFEM Portal on Women, Peace and Security

<http://www.womenwarpeace.org>

United Nations, Policy Dialogue. Enhancing the Operational Impact of Peacekeeping Operations. Gender Balance in Military and Police Services Deployed to UN Peacekeeping Missions (New York: UN, March 2006), 23

[http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Peacekeeping/DPKO/women\\_in\\_peacekeeping.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Peacekeeping/DPKO/women_in_peacekeeping.pdf)

WILPF PeaceWomen

<http://www.peacewomen.org>

World Health Organization, WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women: Summary Report (Geneva: WHO, 2005)

[http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who\\_multicountry\\_study/en/](http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/en/)

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