



Photo: National Police of Honduras

# Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean 2021 - 2024

## Introduction

The region of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) currently faces complex and enduring security challenges. This region is home to a population of over 650 million people, spread across 40 countries and territories. High levels of violence, gender-based violence (GBV), and gender inequality are major impediments to socio-economic development. Social and economic inequality has increased over the last decade. According to Latinobarometro in its 2018 report, there is low government approval in 18 countries in LAC, which can be considered an indicator of the decline of trust in democratic institutions. Although recent changes of national governments can contribute to reshaping this trend, the low levels of legitimacy are signs of a critical governance crisis in LAC. DCAF started operations in the region in 2017 and has expanded the program in Honduras, Colombia, and Chile focusing on police reform, gender, internal- external control, parliamentary and media oversight, and use of force.

The militarization of law enforcement has had serious consequences for democracy and has weakened human security in the region.

Trends in the region include high urban population density and deficient risk management practices that have also increased the population's exposure to the impacts of climate change. Moreover, disputes among illegal armed groups over territorial control, and poorly regulated industrial activities, such as timber trade and the extraction of natural resources have had major environmental, security, and human rights impacts in the LAC region.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had severe economic, political, and social impacts on the LAC region which is one of the most affected worldwide. It is estimated that the COVID-19 crisis may lead LAC to experience larger GDP contractions.

## Key security challenges and opportunities

### Gender-based violence

The number of femicides in the LAC region is one of the highest in the world. In addition to the socio- economic causes that condition violence, patriarchal masculinities (expressed in the term "machismo") continue to shape gender- specific violence in LAC, as well as legal systems that not only fail to respond to, but often reinforce, the imbalance of power that leads to this inequality in security and justice.

## **Hyper-militarization of policing**

The militarization of law enforcement has had serious consequences for democracy and has weakened human security in LAC. The war on drugs, the operation of non-state armed groups and criminal organizations, and the need to control social unrest amid the recent demonstrations against local governments organized by the civil society across LAC, have reinforced the excessive militarization in policing.

## **Limited law enforcement capacity**

Moreover, despite having the highest crime rates in the world, the number of police officers available in the LAC region to address criminality remains low. In consequence, hybrid forms of security have emerged. This notably relates to private security companies that in most states of the region now outnumber police officers.

## **Politicization of security and justice**

The security and justice sectors in LAC continue to be highly politicized and with limitations in terms of resources and modernization to perform their response and prevention roles. Long-term SSR objectives are frequently challenged by short-term political goals, high rates of political and civil service turnover in the region, and endemic levels of corruption. This is also reflected in weak parliamentary oversight of the security sector due to outdated legal frameworks, lack of resources or knowledge, and fear of reprisals.

## **Overcrowded prisons**

LAC has faced a serious prison crisis characterized by impunity, high rates of recidivism, riots, poor sanitary conditions, and overcrowding. This situation is a significant challenge for the security sector since overcrowded prisons not only pose critical human rights concerns but have also proven to facilitate the spread of illicit activities and recruitment by criminal organizations.

## **COVID-19 pandemic**

Due to rising unemployment and poverty rates, drug consumption has increased among the most vulnerable and socio-economically disadvantaged population and, in some cases, moving to illegal drug cultivation or trafficking activities is becoming an appealing option to survive during the economic crisis posed by the pandemic. The police and military forces – as well as private security companies – have been on the frontline of the crisis ensuring that lockdown measures are enforced and engaging less in community policing. Therefore, these actors have also

had to operationally adapt their institutions to cope with new forms of crime while coping with a high number of officers and employees infected by COVID-19.

## **Adapting to change during COVID-19**

The COVID-19 outbreak in LAC has resulted in a quick operational adaptation of the police and military forces, as well as of private security actors, to address the health crisis and security concerns that emerged or increased. Moreover, innovative internal and external communication mechanisms, such as police partnering with CSOs to raise awareness around rising levels of gender-based violence, have been used by security institutions, which have shown receptiveness on the part of citizens and can potentially improve their confidence.

## **Citizen security and prevention**

Reactive practices that have characterized the approach of the police forces in LAC have been contrasted, in the context of the pandemic, by the increase in prevention interventions and community services in some countries. In addition, various efforts have been undertaken to decrease the levels of GBV and achieve gender equality both within the security sector and in the broader society. The experience of DCAF promoting gender security issues with the security sector has contributed to the updating of police protocols to better respond to GBV in the region, this has been augmented by advancing gender mainstreaming in the police forces through customized assessments and work with rural communities on their security needs.

## **Opportunities for comprehensive reform**

The social unrest and mass protests experienced in some countries in the region since the end of 2019 have revealed abusive practices by security institutions in handling these scenarios. These practices have not only intensified protests, but also led to a popular outcry for security sector reform. In Chile, after months of social protest, a referendum was held to decide on the approval of a constituent assembly to reform the current constitution. This referendum was widely approved, and Chile will enter the process of negotiating and drafting a new constitution. This scenario opens the door to engage in comprehensive security sector reform in line with the principles of good governance.





Lt. Colonel Lurangeli Franco Rodríguez with women from rural communities in conflict-affected areas of Colombia. Photo: National Police of Colombia

## Oversight of the security sector

Due to the high levels of corruption, violence, and human rights abuses, it will be crucial to support the role of the media and civil society as oversight actors, and benefit from their potential to support the police and ombuds-institutions in the protection of vulnerable population, such as human rights defenders and social leaders. In this regard, DCAF will continue to engage with social leaders and media professionals, and also support the Defensoría del Pueblo (Ombudsman's office of Colombia) to reinforce its early warning system to safeguard the lives of people at higher risk. Moreover, DCAF has contributed to strengthening accountability mechanisms via the support to parliaments and media oversight in Colombia.

## DCAF's approach

DCAF recognizes that national actors hold the primary responsibility for undertaking SSR and focuses on accompanying national efforts and processes in a way that reinforces local ownership. When advising national authorities, DCAF will always seek to provide them with a comparative perspective on international norms and standards as well as existing good practice and will aim to tailor advice to best address the national context and needs.

DCAF prioritizes building trusted partnerships with national actors, emphasizes the neutral/impartial nature of its advice, and takes a holistic approach to SSR that supports all security sector actors - those providing, managing, controlling, and overseeing security. DCAF also cooperates with and supports international actors with whom DCAF shares a common objective. The choice of concrete thematic areas, objectives, partners and approaches is shaped in an agile way through an ongoing dialogue, which will always involve the beneficiary at all stages of the process, from initial scoping, through assessment, design, steering of implementation, result monitoring and reporting.

## Leveraging DCAFs full capacity

Developing DCAF's operational portfolio with national actors in LAC region is the responsibility of the LAC Unit. As the geographical lead, it plays a coordination role and supports the deployment of thematic and methodological expertise from across the organization to ensure that DCAF provides a joined-up and coherent response to the needs and requests of our members and partners in the entire area. This includes ISSAT support to building the capacity of bilateral and multilateral partners working in the region, as well as policy and research support, including the development and publication of key knowledge products on security sector governance and reform. It also includes expertise and guidance on key thematic areas including gender and security and business and security.

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# Objectives



## Reaffirm the value of democratic governance in addressing current and emerging security challenges.

For the next four years, DCAF will focus in the LAC region on the principles of rule of law, accountability, participation, and responsiveness by strengthening the capacities of state and non-state security sector actors including law enforcement, police and justice institutions, parliaments, media, external oversight actors, and civil society organizations.

### Parliamentary oversight

With regard to parliamentary oversight, this strategy aims to lay the foundations for effective oversight of the security sector through approaches including developing a baseline of existing parliamentary oversight mechanisms (as DCAF has recently done in Colombia), identifying specific areas for improvement, and seeking opportunities to cooperate with civil society organizations to further improve oversight.

### Police reform

DCAF's program in Honduras will focus on the roll out of community policing, and the development of confidence measures as a means of better connecting the police with the needs of the population. This will be finalized in 2021 and DCAF will work towards the replication of this measure, adjusted to contextual needs, in countries such as Chile and Mexico.

In Honduras we will focus on the roll out of community policing and the development of confidence measures as a means of better connecting the police with the needs of the population.

### Penal reform and prison management

These have been identified as additional areas where the governance of the security sector is important for the reduction of violence, especially in sub-regions such as Central America and the Caribbean. DCAF will explore potential entry points on this issue in Haiti and Venezuela and look for other opportunities to work in the justice and penal sector.

### Addressing emerging challenges and reinforcing South-South cooperation

DCAF will work with, and contribute to, multilateral partners' efforts in the region. DCAF continually monitors the changing dynamics in the region and prepares for potential challenges such as dramatic drops in citizen confidence and the legitimacy of public forces, the proliferation of demonstrations and protests, or a further increase in migration flows. DCAF will also help partners to build on recent successful examples of cooperation.

By 2024 DCAF aims to consolidate its position as the 'go-to' partner in SSG/R issues for the LAC region, generating knowledge, innovative tools, and contextualized practices that are relevant at the international level as well as for the relevant national actors across the security sector. To achieve this objective, DCAF will build on its existing work and expertise developed over the last few years in the region and will continue establishing synergies across the organization, as well as with external partners and stakeholders.



## Enhance engagement in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

DCAF will continue to focus its efforts on engaging with different stakeholders where conflict, high levels of homicide, and fragility are pressing issues. In such contexts, particular emphasis will be placed on strengthening the capacities of state and non-state actors and reducing vulnerabilities. These engagements will be based on the principle of “do no harm”, which implies that risk assessments will be regularly conducted. Innovative approaches will be explored on issues such as hybrid security, ensuring DCAF’s work aligns with local priorities and contributes to building resilience among state and non-state actors in fragile areas. This includes, for example, working with non-traditional security actors, such as social leaders and media professionals, to promote dialogue and trust with public security forces.

### Police modernization

In Honduras, the work carried out to date has allowed DCAF to support reforms focused on the modernization of the Honduran National Police. These efforts are primarily focused on areas such as reform planning, gender self-assessment, internal and external controls, use of force, community policing, and the system of police education. DCAF will continue to support the National Police and the Ministry of Security of Honduras with the overall goal of reducing violence and promoting a more peaceful and safer environment for Honduran citizens.

### External oversight and accountability

The work undertaken in Honduras on external control of the security sector will be shared across the region via knowledge products and will be complemented by the two-year project (2020-2022) on media oversight and SSG implemented in Colombia with the support of the German government. This project aims to create lasting conditions and capacity for social leaders, human rights defenders, and media practitioners so that they can play a more active role in security sector oversight in more fragile contexts. This project will contribute to strengthening the role of social leaders and journalists in the governance of the security sector and will allow consolidation of the work of DCAF in the area of civil society and media oversight, and possible expansion in Mexico, Chile and Honduras. DCAF will continue reinforcing local ownership of security sector oversight processes in fragile contexts by promoting dialogue spaces between the media and law enforcement institutions and promoting local and regional networks of Ombuds institutions on a national and regional level.



DCAF presents awards for leadership and excellence to outstanding female police officers of the National Police of Colombia. Photo: DCAF

### Gender and security

DCAF has produced tailored recommendations for the police and other security actors in Colombia to improve women’s access to security in conflict-affected areas. In the next four years, DCAF will consolidate its work on gender by finalizing the gender self-assessment and resulting action plan, and supporting the implementation of the recommendations that emerge from these processes. Likewise, DCAF aims to replicate the experience of the implementation of the gender self-assessments with other national police forces in Chile, Mexico, and Bolivia, which have expressed their interest in taking this important step towards becoming more gender-responsive institutions.

DCAF will develop a ‘learning hub of good practices’ on hybrid security that will be fed through South-South cooperation.

## Hybrid Security

DCAF aims to explore the possibility to work on hybrid forms of security in Mexico and Colombia. Across the LAC region there has been a proliferation of alternative security providers including non-state actors, ranging from private security companies to indigenous communities, but also rebel and criminal organizations. These hybrid forms of security

pose a challenge for ensuring accountability and other good governance principles. To increase the exchange of SSG experiences on this and other issues within the region, DCAF will develop a 'learning hub of good practices' that will be fed through South-South cooperation and other regional experiences.



## Strengthen SSG/R contributions to international policy and practice.

### Partnerships with multilateral institutions

DCAF continues to partner with the UN, EU, World Bank, Organization of American States (OAS) and other major multilateral organizations that work in the region to provide relevant and timely contributions to policy dialogue.

### Agenda 2030

The respect for human rights and international law will continue to be at the core of all operational initiatives. International and regional human rights instruments and other multilateral efforts such as the Sustainable Development Goals, will serve as a key reference and framework for DCAF's actions.

### Sharing lessons learned

Likewise, DCAF is committed to fostering a bottom-up approach that enables the international community to learn and benefit from the experiences in the field through interregional panel-discussions, webinars, knowledge products, regional networks, and SSR/G working groups. In addition, DCAF will continue making accessible in the Spanish language, relevant international material, policies, and knowledge products to promote engagement from stakeholders in the LAC region.

## Other thematic priorities

### Migration

Special emphasis will be given to security issues linked to drivers of increased migration flows. DCAF will explore engagement opportunities on border control and migration management in the sub-regions where this is a bigger concern, such as the Amazon and Central America.

### Independent oversight of institutions

DCAF also expects to start working on improving independent oversight of the security sector by collaborating with the Ombudsman institutions of Colombia and Mexico.

### Financial oversight

Financial oversight of the security sector is key, especially during the economic crisis exacerbated by the pandemic. Efforts in parliamentary oversight of the security sector will include a focus on financial management.

### Climate change

The direct impact of climate change on security is an additional priority topic in the agenda of DCAF. In the LAC region, efforts will be undertaken to study these impacts and to support security sector institutions when addressing the impacts of natural disasters, environmental degradation, natural resources depletion and COVID-19 related challenges, all of which are compounded by climate change.

## Implementation

The success of the implementation of this strategy will largely depend on adequate funding. Until now the orientation and the constant analysis of the needs and demands on SSR/G in the region have been key to secure significant funds from different donors to anchor DCAF with a diversified portfolio in LAC. DCAF has positioned itself as an important interlocutor in Colombia and Honduras thanks to its diversified thematic coverage on SSG/R, that ranges from strengthening the integrity of police services to assisting legislative bodies, media and civil society in overseeing the security sector. This achieved

standing and reputation in Colombia and Honduras are important milestones that will facilitate the implementation of this strategy in the coming years.

## Strengthen partnerships and outreach

DCAF's long term partnerships with the UN, the EU and the World Bank are all relevant to the LAC region and will continue to develop over the period covered by this strategy. Since 2017 DCAF has increased outreach to key institutions in the region such as the Organization of American States (OAS). To have more influence on a multilateral level in the coming years, it will be important to expand the collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank and other sub-regional organizations like the CARICOM-Caribbean Community, the Caribbean and the Central America Integration System, MERCOSUR and UNISUR. With the objective to create a platform to expand the regional agenda, DCAF co-created a group focused on the LAC region with the Peace Building Platform in Geneva, featuring high level participation and discussion under the "Chatham House Rules" on critical security challenges. In the coming years, DCAF will work towards expanding its outreach and to increase the international visibility of the work carried out in the LAC region.



Video recording sessions with social leader Lázaro Rojas, as part of the Media and Security sector oversight project in Colombia. Photo: Diego Rodríguez, La Escuela Digital (LED)

## Monitoring progress and strategic steering

DCAF's monitoring and evaluation guidelines will be followed in all programs. Effective implementation of the guidelines will ensure greater accountability, steering, learning, and ultimately will strengthen DCAF's work in LAC.

## Communications

The translation of DCAF's key documents such as the Handbook on Police Accountability, Oversight And Integrity and the Gender and Security Tool Kit into Spanish has been an important investment to increase outreach and presence in the LAC region. In the coming years, DCAF will continue making accessible written and audio-visual material in Spanish that will be coupled with a multi-level and innovative communication strategy to reach officers on the ground, citizens, donors, and policymakers.

## Membership

Argentina is the only Latin-American member of the DCAF Foundation Council (FC), and Chile participates only as observer. The inclusion of other LAC countries in the FC board will facilitate the implementation of this strategy. Honduras will soon appoint a representative while the membership of Mexico will be formalized in 2021. Also, after preliminary conversations, it can be expected that Colombia will soon join.

## Staffing and deployment

The value of DCAF's field presence, which has grown in recent years, has become even more evident during the COVID-19 crisis. The field office in Honduras not only provides valuable local expertise and insights, but also played a key role in ensuring continuity of operations throughout 2020. The role of field offices, in combination with remote advising, will remain central in the coming years, with the added advantage of minimizing DCAF's carbon footprint by reducing the need for travel. Given the wide scope of operations in Colombia, and as strategy to facilitate sub-regional expansion, DCAF will analyze the establishment of other field offices where appropriate or justified by the program portfolio. In the interest of consolidation and donor harmonization, the creation of a trust fund will also be analyzed as a potential structure to support the implementation of program.

## Evolution in the context of COVID-19

Throughout the global pandemic of 2020, DCAF continuously adapted its operations to provide the best possible support to partners that were faced to new and rapidly evolving challenges. E-learning and remote advising have become an increasingly important product of DCAF's offer. These forms of support will be further developed and expanded in

the coming years. DCAF is already working with partners to capture lessons learned and identifying new opportunities for SSG/R that are emerging because of the pandemic. This work will remain relevant in the coming years as the effects of COVID-19 will be enduring.

## Risks and mitigation measures

Security sector reform is a complex and sensitive endeavor that entails risks. Political contexts evolve, affecting the degree of political willingness to support SSR, which may be perceived as a threat to the established ways of doing business or misaligned with existing incentive structures. DCAF's strong focus on local ownership helps to mitigate these risks by placing the emphasis on the role of local stakeholders in the design and implementation of SSR programs. Building good relationships with donors in local embassies and capitals is also key to ensuring DCAF's technical support is complemented by political engagement.

Security risks may also be significant, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, with serious implications for program stakeholders including the institutions responsible for security. DCAF prioritizes a conflict-sensitive program management approach to carefully assess the risks to protect all involved parties, particularly beneficiaries. Operations in the field are based on thorough and regular security assessments. In higher-risk scenarios, alternative means of participation are developed, such as remote assistance.

To facilitate sub-regional expansion, DCAF will analyze the establishment of other field offices where appropriate or justified by the program portfolio.

**DCAF** Geneva Centre  
for Security Sector  
Governance

DCAF is dedicated to making people more secure through accountable and effective security and justice.

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