

# STRATEGY

2025-2030



## 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 capacitybuilding of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

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# Message from our Director

At the time of finalizing this new strategy, the geopolitical flux of the past years and challenges to the rules-based international order show no sign of abating. Our world is facing significant uncertainties. Risks stemming from global tensions are further compounded by disruptive technologies transforming the nature of warfare or creating new vulnerabilities, while climate change acts as both a driver of increased insecurity and a risk multiplier. Our consistent engagement will be necessary to bring our planet back on track, and our team is ready to do its part.

At DCAF, we remain convinced that democratic governance of the security sector is an essential component of just, peaceful, and inclusive societies. With decades of experience supporting reforms in more than 70 countries, we have learned that safeguarding and reinforcing good security sector governance is crucial in helping people feel safer. This is especially true in our increasingly volatile and divided world.

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, the war in Gaza, civil war in Sudan, coups d'état in West Africa – these are only some recent instances of a multiplying number of wars and violent conflicts, democratic reversals, and state capture of the security sector. Around the world, we see an increase in defence spending and a return to hard security, which, in turn, demands a greater focus on effective oversight and checks and balances.

These developments play a major role in the breakdown of trust in the social contract between the people and security providers. Geopolitical tensions are also further complicating efforts to address shared global challenges. Upholding values such as good governance, human rights, and gender equality has also become more difficult in this environment.

This is part of a global trend that represents a significant stress test for multilateralism. The fundamentals of liberal democracies are being questioned and the coming years will be pivotal for democratic governance. Moreover, the second half of this decade will be crucial for forging a new international consensus on the post-2030 Agenda. This is why we decided to align our strategy period to 2030 and this critical timeline.

Security without governance is not an option, and we want to bring governance of the security sector to the heart of the conversation – at the local, national, regional, and global levels.

At a time when inequalities are soaring, we are committed to a stronger focus on an inclusive and intersectional approach throughout all our work. We want to remain at the forefront of knowledge on gender and security sector governance, and in promoting gender equality. We must engage young people in decision-making and foster inclusive, safe, and sustainable solutions to security and justice delivery.

In this fragmented international order, building and repairing trust is fundamental to achieving peace and setting the stage for development. Only when people feel safe in their societies can they focus on developing education, healthcare, business, or other essential aspects of prosperous communities. This requires confidence in their government's ability to maintain security and justice for all.

Our new strategy outlines the ambitions of DCAF for the coming years. It draws on lessons we have learned, and accounts for the contributions we will continue to make toward a long-term vision, together with our partners. It is the result of consultations with DCAF colleagues from our offices across the world, and with key partners and actors in our sector, to whom we remain grateful for their valuable inputs. We are convinced that partnerships, paired with bold and creative solutions, are the sound foundation for our strategy. Including diverse perspectives is essential for achieving meaningful impact and creating a positive change in our world.

In parallel with the launch of this new strategy for 2025-2030, DCAF will undertake an organizational update to enhance our effectiveness and ensure that we are fit-for-purpose to deliver on our mission for our donors and partners. This update will place greater emphasis on strategic steering, learning, and combining action with solid and grounded policy influencing.

This strategy will guide our work for the next six years, but we will remain agile and flexible in order to adapt to the needs of our partners, the changing contexts, and events in real time. We will continue to evolve and innovate to achieve our vision of a world where democratic security sector governance leads to sustainable peace and development and human dignity for all.

**Ambassador Nathalie Chuard**  
Director



## Our vision

We envision a world where democratic security sector governance advances sustainable peace and development and human dignity for all.

## Our mission

Our mission is to advance the security of all people through nationally owned, inclusive, and participatory security sector reforms based on international norms and good practices.

## Our guiding principles

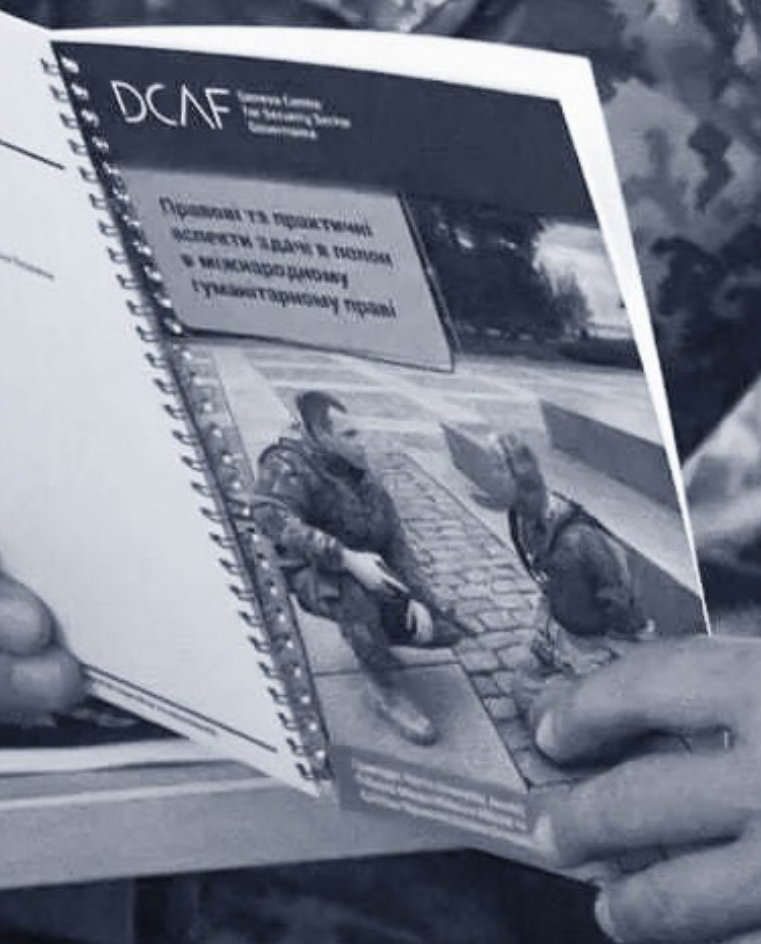
We commit to applying the following four principles throughout our work:

A human rights-based approach with gender equality at its core and the rule of law as a compass.

Democratic governance underpinned by accountability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness.

National ownership at all stages of DCAF's engagement and work with partners, to address the needs of affected populations.

Impartiality in assessing needs, in implementing projects, and in engaging with partners and parties.



# Our strategic context

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The beginning of the current decade has been marked by fluctuating geopolitics, rising authoritarianism, growing inequality, threats to human rights, and emboldened nationalism and populism. These trends are transforming interstate dynamics and fuelling a growing disengagement from multilateralism. At the same time, the pressure on national democratic institutions is increasing. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated global developments that have negatively affected the provision of security for all people. In addition, the current global context has been deeply affected by Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. The war in Gaza has also dramatically heightened tensions in the Middle East and beyond. Wars and crises are multiplying. New fault lines have been appearing and new alliances created.

DCAF is therefore operating in an unpredictable global environment, in an era characterized by large-scale vulnerabilities and international tensions. During DCAF's last strategic period 2020-2024, we witnessed an increase in the number of contexts marked by fragility, conflict, and violence around the globe. We believe the crisis of democracy has reached a tipping point, with democratic reversals, coups d'état, and state captures of the security sector as some examples of the breakdown of trust in the social contract between the people and security providers.

In addition to continuing to work with security institutions, our last strategic period underlined the continued importance of working with non-state actors such as civil society organizations and the private sector. We can also see that the delivery of security and justice by hybrid actors is becoming more prevalent. Understanding the security and justice needs of individuals and communities through participatory, inclusive, and equitable approaches is fundamental to DCAF's people-centred approach to fostering public confidence in the security sector. We will continue to enhance our partnerships with bilateral and multilateral actors to nurture the groundwork and reinforce the framework that guides our work.

While international law is being challenged, human rights and the rule of law have always been, and will remain, at the heart of DCAF's work. Addressing and preventing conflict by supporting and encouraging gender-responsive and people-centred security represents a true potential to transform international assistance in security sector reform (SSR), as well as peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Although we witnessed more meaningful participation of women in the security sector during the 2020-2024 strategic period, the achievements that have been made towards gender equality are at risk of backsliding. There will be a need to support more accountable institutions, effective policies, and inclusive approaches to address the root causes of discrimination by, and to restore confidence in, the security sector. To do so, we must apply an inclusive and intersectional approach to reforms by accounting for the impact of sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, among other factors, on security and justice needs. We must engage young people in decision-making to foster inclusive, safe, and sustainable solutions to security and justice delivery.

In the coming years, the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss will continue to be a threat multiplier that exacerbates existing conflicts and inequalities. Safety and security in urban contexts will become more complex, and migration will likely increase as a result of the climate crisis. At the same time, these vulnerabilities and disparities will be amplified by rapid technological development – including the use and abuse of artificial intelligence – which not only raises questions around surveillance technologies, but also fuels the spread of misinformation. A free media that can independently verify information is therefore essential for the turbulent times ahead. As these transnational challenges evolve more rapidly than the legal frameworks governing them, the security sector must look to the future to develop innovative and agile responses to complex situations.

As a result of these trends, the crisis of global governance is putting increasing pressure on the validity of multilateralism, global standards, and international collaboration. The second half of this decade will be crucial in forging a new international consensus on the post-2030 Agenda. In parallel, we can expect that many of DCAF's donor states will be under pressure to reduce public spending whilst increasing expenditure in the defence sector. Our responsibility is thus to demonstrate the impact of good security sector governance (SSG) and its potential to bring positive change to the delivery of security and justice to the people. Headquartered in the heart of International Geneva, DCAF is uniquely positioned to influence international frameworks and agendas and to leverage its partnerships to promote good SSG and to help make the societies, communities, and people feel safer.

DCAF remains dedicated to making states and people safer, within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. In this context, we believe that DCAF's work to empower national partners to strengthen accountable, effective, and inclusive security provision is needed more than ever. In the 2025-2030 strategic period, we intend to secure inroads to improve security governance in fragile, conflict, and violence-affected societies. We plan to engage with security sector actors to promote gender equality and intersectional approaches in addressing discrimination, exclusion, and injustice. Against this backdrop, and through our operational, advisory, policy, and research functions, we are determined to expand our collaboration with bilateral and multilateral actors to reinforce international engagement on SSG.

The world is now becoming an open wound. Let us all apply ourselves to closing it together.

**Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein**

Opening Ceremony of the 10th annual  
Geneva Peace Week  
30 October 2023



# Our lessons from the 2020-2024 strategic period

## We know that our purpose remains as relevant as ever

As complex security challenges multiply, we are confronted with an increasing demand from our partners to support holistic reforms of their security sector. In the last strategic period, we saw more than ever that good SSG must not only include the key principles of effectiveness and accountability, but also inclusiveness. As security challenges evolve, we need to constantly update our understanding of good governance to reflect our current realities. DCAF's three levers of support through strategic and operational advice, policy research and influence, and knowledge-sharing and capacity development have proven valuable in the preceding decades, and we want to use them more effectively to strengthen an institutionalized feedback loop that allows us to deliver high-level analysis of global trends and their impact on the ground to our partners.

## We must overcome resistance to gender equality

While the 2022 evaluation concluded that DCAF has a "very positively perceived track record working on mainstreaming gender", the backlash against women's rights and gender equality in recent years show that this work is more critical than ever. Our experience shows that integrating a gender perspective and adopting an intersectional lens into SSG increases local ownership, improves the delivery of security and justice, increases gender equality, and enhances the oversight and accountability of the security sector. We have met, and know that we will continue to meet, resistance to mainstreaming gender in our work. Over the next strategic period, we need to make a better, stronger case for gender equality across the board with the goal to addressing discrimination based on gender and other intersecting factors. We plan to continue mainstreaming gender in all areas of our work, both internally and externally.

As security challenges evolve we need to constantly update our understanding of good governance to reflect our current realities.

## We need to be responsive to the needs of people in fragile contexts

A significant part of DCAF's work takes places in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected contexts such as Burkina Faso, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Niger, Palestine, Somalia, and Yemen. With the events that occurred during the last strategic period, we have learned that we cannot continue to conduct business as usual. Classic approaches must be adapted to reflect the new ways of working and programming that accounts for the different security and justice needs of different people and communities. We plan to adopt a stronger people-centred approach to identify effective entry points towards broader reform efforts, while also demonstrating the value of SSG as an effective problem-solving tool. In so doing, we will continue to inspect, expand, and update a body of knowledge and policy guidance that will inform our bilateral and multilateral support to our partners.

## We have to look beyond working only with state institutions

In many of the unstable, violence- or conflict-affected environments where we work, fragility is defined by structural state deficits which SSG alone cannot fix. We have learned that it is essential to consider hybrid security dynamics and actors from the early stages of context analysis, needs assessment, and programme design, with a deliberate effort to identify potential entry-points to engaging with such actors or to at least understand their influence and role in the issue area targeted by reform programmes. There have been positive examples of DCAF's engagement with such actors in consultations, joint grassroots work, and in discussing key reforms that have confirmed the wide scope of possible engagement that can improve the impact and relevance of reform activities. Engaging with hybrid security actors will require DCAF to operate at more local levels, beyond capital cities and regional capitals.



## We need to amplify our engagement with the private sector

The 2020-2024 period has underlined DCAF's role as a global thought- and do-leader in the field of business and security. The continued quest for minerals to underpin the green transition has increased the spotlight on security and human rights risks in private sector operations and supply chains. Private military and security companies (PMSCs) have also gained increasing prominence, particularly in fragile states. Based on demonstrable expertise in these areas, we will increase DCAF programming to address the significant challenges and opportunities posed by private sector actors. Over the next strategic period, we plan to further engage the private sector across DCAF programming as part of a holistic, multistakeholder approach to SSG.

## We must engage with our partners even earlier to influence change

During the last strategic period, in several contexts where there has been a transition from war to peace, or from authoritarian rule to democratic governance, security sector reform (SSR) has become central to peace and political processes. In such contexts, international partners often scramble to find meaningful ways of engaging in this area. We have learnt that the key can be to engage even before a formal transition process is fully underway, to help prepare the ground for the eventuality that a window of opportunity to support SSR will emerge. In the next strategic period, we plan to invest more in robust capacity building and dialogue between civilian stakeholders to ensure they are empowered and well placed to lead on designing, implementing, and monitoring SSR processes during the transition.

## We aim at being more intentional about reinforcing SSG in international frameworks

At DCAF, we are convinced that SSG is key to all three pillars of multilateralism: development, peace and security, and human rights. By acknowledging the critical role of SSG in promoting peace and sustainable development, we can more effectively address the complex challenges facing global security. Nevertheless, the ongoing risks to multilateralism – and democratic governance itself – underscore the constant need to reinforce international engagement on SSG. Being more intentional about our role in this regard requires fostering a collective commitment to prioritize these issues and integrate them into broader policy discussions and initiatives. The next strategic period will be crucial in determining the outlook for the post-2030 Agenda, and we remain committed to promote more coherent international engagement and to reinforce SSG in bilateral and multilateral agendas.

## We want to build on DCAF's ability to adapt to the changing environment

In a rapidly evolving global context, our strength is our ability to adapt. As underlined in the 2022 evaluation: “[DCAF’s] constant adaptation and search for improvement has to a large extent become part of the organization’s DNA.” We have learnt that the key to agility is to determine clear expected outcomes while standing ready to explore limited adaptation or change to evolving realities, based on flexible programming. During the next strategic period, we foresee an even greater need to be agile and develop innovative responses in an era of democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space. To do so, we need to reinforce our existing competencies in SSG programming and develop novel and adaptive approaches to ensuring people-centred security and justice in even the most difficult contexts.



Working in a fast-evolving environment, DCAF has continuously displayed the ability to manage change.

External Evaluation of the Geneva Centres, Switzerland: Final Report, May 2022

# Our objectives, results, and priorities

Our objectives for the 2025-2030 period build upon our objectives for 2020-2024 and the lessons we have learned. We see our objectives as interrelated and indivisible. Furthermore, we see that every part of DCAF must contribute to each objective. These objectives are our ambitions for the next six years.

Over the coming period, we intend to remain engaged in various geographic contexts whilst prioritizing our strategic advising and operational engagement with national partners, our analytical support and advice to bilateral partners, and our research on the ground.

Our engagement will be dependent on our ability to be flexible and responsive to rapid developments, particularly in contexts where DCAF has country offices. These geographic priorities will be regularly assessed and reflected in our annual workplans. Our thematic priorities will be set to offer the greatest opportunity to advance inclusive, effective, and accountable security for all, through the promotion of SSG, typically linked to wider and connected agendas. We plan to focus on new, innovative ways of addressing transnational security challenges by drawing on our policy and practice expertise in research and programming. Our priorities should reflect the needs and opportunities of local and national stakeholders, be informed by regional and international dynamics and trends, and create a feedback loop by reflecting on needs drawn from DCAF's operational work. Finally, our priorities should reinforce DCAF's position as a leader in the field of SSG.

## Objective 1

Empower national partners to promote and strengthen democratic SSG based on international norms and good practices, and develop responses to new security challenges that place good governance at the centre.

## Objective 2

Identify and capitalize on innovative and secure entry points to advance good SSG in highly adverse environments, such as those marked by substantial democratic reversal, extensive civilian violence, and open violent conflict.

## Objective 3

Engage with security sector actors to promote gender equality and intersectional approaches in addressing discrimination and injustice through SSG.

## Objective 4

Influence international engagement on SSG.



## Objective 1

### Empower national partners to promote and strengthen democratic SSG based on international norms and good practices and develop responses to new security challenges that place good governance at the core.

We work with national actors to support their efforts to ensure security for individuals and states, and enhance the legitimacy, integrity, and good governance of security sectors. We know that DCAF is seen as a trusted partner and is well known for applying a governance-focused approach to different aspects and stages of reform processes. Through our engagement, we have built unique networks of national and international partners and have accumulated knowledge on different contexts and pathways for policy change.

Under our first objective, we will continue our engagement in contexts characterized by relative stability and a credible commitment towards improved governance, enhanced checks and balances, more inclusive security policy making, and better security provision. These environments are characterized by a high degree of internal and external acceptance for international norms that underlie the SSG agenda, but also by high levels of contestation that can precipitate risks of democratic reversal, reforms backsliding, erosion of public trust, and instability. Long-term support is crucial for maintaining democratic momentum, ensuring that progress made is not only maintained, but also deepened and substantiated. Therefore, it is important to support and sustain ongoing security sector reforms to embed changes durably within the fabric of society.

We will build the capacities of oversight institutions and civil society to enlarge spaces for informed public debate.

Our activities under this objective will be guided by strategic approaches designed to foster inclusivity throughout the SSG chain, and to normalize accountability at all levels. We will sustain our long-term partnerships with a diverse range of security sector actors and foster multistakeholder dialogues at national and regional levels that connect oversight actors, security institutions, and the private sector to build confidence and ensure that diverse viewpoints are considered in planning and implementation. We will build the capacities of oversight institutions and civil society to enlarge spaces for an informed public debate on the objectives and results of SSR processes.

In these contexts, we also aspire to engage with national partners to address current and emerging security challenges which have become increasingly complex, intersecting, and interconnected, while agreement on normative frameworks and international best practice may not yet have emerged. We want to continue to anticipate and analyse the implications that these issues may have for the security sector and support our partners in developing innovative responses to these challenges based on the principles of democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law.

Contributing to informed policy debate will require DCAF to invest in documenting and disseminating lessons learned from successful implementation of SSG, as well as its outcomes and benefits across diverse contexts. We will tailor this work to respond to national demand for policy advice and specific thematic expertise on how to best translate norms and experiences into national policy and practice.

#### To achieve this objective, we will work towards the following results:

- **Result 1.1:** National partners ensure accountable, inclusive, and effective security provision, management, and oversight through DCAF support in designing and implementing long-term processes.
- **Result 1.2:** Inclusive SSG is advanced through a broadened participation of civil society and the private sector in SSG processes.
- **Result 1.3:** National and international partners implement governance-focused responses to emerging security challenges such as cybersecurity, climate change, artificial intelligence, disinformation, and other hybrid threats.

## Objective 2

### Identify and capitalize on innovative and secure entry points to advance good SSG in highly adverse environments, such as those marked by substantial democratic reversal, extensive civilian violence, and open violent conflict.

The principles of good SSG have a strong potential to improve security for all, not only in contexts where their normative foundations are generally accepted, but also in environments where they are being contested. In these environments, however, identifying appropriate entry points that might elicit local and national buy-in into a governance-oriented reform agenda may be particularly challenging. This requires great attention to the realities of local political economies and power structures, and the identification of innovative ways to demonstrate the relevance of SSG amidst crisis situations.

#### A well-governed security sector can help prevent violence from spiralling.

In contexts that are affected by open conflict, either intra- or inter-state, military takeovers and full-on democratic backsliding, or an explosion of civilian violence, it is common to see the civic space needed for SSR shrink drastically. In such contexts, states enter various forms of states of exceptions in an attempt to either preserve leaders' privileges, power, and rule, or to cope with exceptional circumstances, such as war, widespread terrorism, overwhelming gang violence, or constitutional suspension. As a result, insisting on good governance norms may appear counter-intuitive to leaders and stakeholders focused on consolidating power and/or stemming an immediate threat, and who may believe that a degree of authoritarian and opaque governance is required to achieve these goals.

Our second objective recognizes both the need and the challenge for DCAF to engage with and in such contexts, where basic conditions for classic SSR interventions may not be met, but where non-engagement or disengagement would likely come at an even higher cost for the peace and security of local populations. In these environments, stakeholders' buy-in to reform agendas cannot be assumed but must be built through an approach that relies on granular context analysis, multistakeholder engagement, and an on-going assessment of the risks that engagement or disengagement may pose to ourselves, our partners, and to SSG principles.

Through this objective, we aspire to harness the potential of SSG at all stages of the conflict, violence and political instability continuum, especially as a preventive tool in the early stages of conflict, when we know a well-governed security sector can help prevent violence from spiralling. It is also a mitigation mechanism to support countries caught in conflict, violence, or political instability and help them to establish or restore functional, norms-driven security sectors that serve the needs of the people. Finally, SSG is a contributor to post-conflict reconstruction, notably by supporting stakeholder design and implementing conflict exit roadmaps that capitalize on its pacifying potential.

Ultimately, we want to continue to make a tangible contribution to the broader global goals of mitigating fragility, sustaining peace, and preventing conflict, and to innovate the ways to accomplish this aim through highly contextualized interventions.

#### To achieve this objective, we will work towards the following results:

- **Result 2.1:** Relying on an in-depth understanding of the context and a thoughtful questioning of assumptions, SSG engagement in anticipation or early stages of violence and conflict helps prevent violence escalation.
- **Result 2.2:** The international community effectively adapt SSG norms and practices to contexts of democratic reversal, open conflict, and widespread violence, and document these experiences to feed into the broader policy and practice agenda.
- **Result 2.3:** Through providing a multistakeholder platform for trust building and dialogue, SSG contributes to conflict resolution.

## Objective 3

### Engage with security sector actors to promote gender equality and intersectional approaches in addressing discrimination and injustice through SSG.

We need to accelerate gender equality and inclusiveness in every part of society. The security sector can play a pivotal role in this effort by establishing transformational policies and practices that meet the needs of all people, and give women an equal opportunity to lead. Our work spans from local security sector actors, grassroots civil society actors, and media to police, military, and peacekeeping operations. We advise the foreign policy of states and engage at the local level alike. Gender equality is significant in all DCAF's work; evidence shows that a more gender equal security sector is a more effective security sector. All reform processes have the potential to promote gender equality. All current and emerging security challenges, conflicts, fragility, disasters, and humanitarian emergencies affect women, girls, boys, and men differently. Women, persons with disabilities, indigenous persons, persons with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, older persons, and youth often have additional and intersecting vulnerabilities, all of which we want to prioritize and help the security sector to acknowledge and address.

For our third objective, we aspire to develop the skills of security sector actors to address the intersectional nature of discrimination, which puts women and girls in vulnerable situations. To do so, we need to build DCAF's own capacity and knowledge on the subject, because DCAF must model good practices. Creating inclusive institutions requires deliberate and concerted efforts. We therefore intend to continue promoting the DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, and UN Women Gender and Security Toolkit. This will allow us to strengthen our outreach to states and develop foreign policies that advance gender equality and intersectional approaches. National action plans on women, peace, and security play a pivotal role in this regard, and we believe they are pertinent tools for setting milestones for transformational national policies.

Our priorities will be to develop our own intersectional approach in programming and policy and build on our mainstreaming approach to gender equality. Furthermore, we will prioritize addressing the gendered impacts of crises and emergencies, including the consequences of the climate crisis for women and girls. Our priority will remain to address gendered insecurities and support communities and security sector actors in addressing gender-based violence.

**We seek to achieve sustainable change by working with security sector institutions to address the root causes of discrimination and injustice.**

We want to continue our engagement with security sector actors and other relevant stakeholders to provide toolkits, training, and the knowledge and skills to better eliminate discrimination, and contribute to the promotion of gender equality with the overarching aim of fostering more peaceful and inclusive societies. We want to continue to explore gender equality at every level of the hierarchy. We seek to achieve sustainable and meaningful change by working with security sector institutions and other stakeholders to address the root causes of discrimination and injustice.

#### To achieve this objective, we will work towards the following results:

- **Result 3.1:** Security sector actors advance gender equality and address current and emerging security challenges through an intersectional lens.
- **Result 3.2:** Legal and policy frameworks, including foreign policies and national action plans on women, peace and security, are developed and implemented to advance gender equality and intersectional approaches in the security sector.
- **Result 3.3:** A gender-responsive and intersectional approach to SSG is integrated throughout DCAF's work.

## Objective 4

### Influence international engagement on SSG.

International actors play an important role in supporting national processes to enhance the accountability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness of security provision and oversight based on international norms and good practices. DCAF is committed to strengthening the coherence and effectiveness of international SSG support. This begins with a more active engagement at the level of international policy influencing, bringing to the forefront experiences from the ground which are vital to advance the development and implementation of international policy agendas, such as the New Agenda for Peace and the 2030 Agenda.

We believe that SSG is key to all three pillars of multilateralism: development, peace and security, and human rights. DCAF is uniquely placed to collect and analyse on-the-ground data, use knowledge acquired from practice, and build upon networks in a broad variety of contexts. This will translate to bringing SSG to broader international agendas at a critical time for the development of the new international consensus post-2030 Agenda. We further aspire to ensure under-represented security sector voices and stakeholders are heard in international fora and to facilitate their direct interaction with policymakers at bilateral and multilateral levels.

As part of our last objective, we are committed to put international policy into practice, notably through advisory support, training, and capacity building to drive more effective, coherent, and coordinated approaches. Our strong policy research function makes us a unique centre of expertise that offers advice and guidance to bilateral and international partners underpinned by empirically-based experiences and lessons.

**We believe that security sector governance is key to all three pillars of multilateralism: development, peace and security, and human rights.**

Building on our ability to convene national and international security sector actors, we aspire to create spaces for dialogue and information exchange among national, bilateral, multilateral, and other partners. We seek to promote more coherent international engagement, which results in multilateral partners designing, implementing, and influencing in a coordinated manner, using their leverage collectively.

Our priority will be to reinforce SSG in bilateral and multilateral agendas. We want to engage strategically with regional organizations and build strong partnerships with international organizations which can reinforce our reach.

We want to continue to be a unique centre of excellence in analysing security trends and offering responses to current and emerging security challenges. This will contribute to our relevance as a trusted partner of bilateral and multilateral actors, thus helping to shape international policy discussions related to the SSG agenda. We further want to remain a uniquely trusted adviser to bilateral partners and guide them in their priority-setting.

#### To achieve this objective, we will work towards the following results:

- **Result 4.1:** DCAF's policy influencing work contributes to greater awareness on lessons from SSG which are relevant to international policy frameworks and includes voices from under-represented security sector actors and stakeholders.
- **Result 4.2:** DCAF's advisory support, training, policy research and guidance is used by bilateral, multilateral, and other partners to enhance the effectiveness of their SSG engagement.
- **Result 4.3:** DCAF's international convening role contributes to coherent and coordinated SSG engagement by bilateral and multilateral partners.



We aspire to ensure under-represented voices are heard in international fora and to facilitate their interaction with policymakers at bilateral and multilateral levels.

# Our levers and institutional pillars

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Our experience supporting reform processes for over two decades in more than 70 countries has established our reputation as an expert in SSG. In everything we do, we adhere to the principles of a human rights-based approach, democratic governance, impartiality, and national ownership. Owing to these strengths, we are trusted by a broad spectrum of state and non-state actors to accompany them through long and complex reform processes.

## Our levers to promote SSG

Our reputation as a trusted partner, which we have cultivated for 25 years, was confirmed in the 2022 external evaluation of the Geneva Centres. We are entrusted by our partners to work with them on highly sensitive issues. Our partners know what we stand for, including our commitment to a human rights-based approach with gender equality at its core and the rule of law as a compass. Moreover, they know us as an impartial organization that does not take political sides when working with highly politicized subjects. Our commitment is to hold ourselves to the highest standards of excellence in analysis, operations, and research.

### Strategic and operational advice

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- We provide strategic advice on how to develop and implement legislative frameworks, policies, and programmes.
- We directly support national partners on the ground to design and implement nationally-owned reforms.
- We assist bilateral partners and international actors in developing and implementing their SSG policies and SSR programmes.

Given the diversity of contexts in which DCAF works and the broad range of actors with whom it engages, we do not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach to our work. The 2022 evaluation underlined that DCAF is, “sensitive to matters of national ownership, [and that it] invests more time and resources in understanding a given problem set as a prelude to intervention, and builds processes and suggestions around needs expressed by the partners”.

For reform processes to be successful, we tailor our activities, projects, and programmes to specific needs and demands. The context knowledge we develop enables us to assess and manage risks in a realistic and thoughtful manner, considering our responsibility to avoid doing harm either to our actors or to the principles of SSG. We base our engagement on a multistakeholder approach to create space for a truly inclusive conversation about national priorities for people-centred SSG. We therefore prioritize convening inclusive local, national and regional platforms with diverse voices to ensure the needs of priorities of all are meaningfully taken into account.

### Policy research and guidance

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- We promote norms, standards, and good practices related to SSG in regional and global norm-setting arenas.
- We provide bilateral and international partners with exclusive analysis and recommendations to strengthen SSG principles and adapt them to current and emerging security challenges.
- We base our research and policy guidance on unique data, knowledge, and networks from our experience on the ground.

Transnational security challenges require security sector actors to remain up-to-date and to adapt their methods and solutions. We want DCAF to remain a centre of excellence through which both bilateral and international partners can find guidance. Our innovative research connects policy and practice in a way that is mutually reinforcing and offers our partners high-quality and multidisciplinary analyses across the spectrum of SSG. Upon request by our partners, our research and policy influencing work are based on lessons learned from experience and comparative evidence collected from more than 70 countries.

SSG knowledge products and tools are essential for securing understanding, sustainability, and adherence to the foundations of SSG. We disseminate our knowledge products as part of our outreach to a broad network of security sector actors. These are vital to building national ownership and learning from best practices and the unforeseen consequences of projects and programmes. We want our knowledge products and tools to connect practice and policy, to be practical and accessible, and to be of excellent quality, which we achieve through collaboration with our partners.



## Knowledge sharing and capacity development

- We assist in capacity development at the individual, institutional, and societal levels.
- We reinforce the knowledge and technical skills of national actors, including through direct and lateral knowledge sharing.
- We collaborate with bilateral and international partners to enhance their skills in SSG through dialogue and information exchange.

DCAF communicates with diverse actors on a regular basis. We have an open-door policy and an impartial attitude to communication with all security sector actors and stakeholders, whether state or non-state. Such communication is essential for knowledge-sharing and contextualization. Therefore, we aim to nourish this broad network of actors and stakeholders.

In all our work, we see our role as a convening force for dialogue, exchange, and learning. We work in societies that are increasingly divided and in which inequality is rising. Transformation of the security sector requires behavioural change and is based on long-term partnerships and communication between security sector actors and other stakeholders, including civil society, the media, and communities at large. Our role is hence to build platforms for dialogue to advance SSG by convening and facilitating multistakeholder cooperation and processes which include beneficiaries, donors, the public and private sectors, and state and non-state actors to maximize the effectiveness of aid.

## Across all our levers

Our work relies on our trusted collaborations. We approach our partners with a sense of humility for their challenges and place them at the heart of our work. We commit to equality with our partners, whether national, bilateral, multilateral, or international, state or non-state.

Our profile as a Swiss-based foundation and impartial partner is central to our ability to work with a wide range of state and non-state actors. Wherever possible, we work in close proximity with partners and beneficiaries. Over the past two decades, DCAF's role has evolved to include a strong emphasis on accompanying our partners on the ground as they design and implement reforms. The COVID-19 health crisis vividly demonstrated the advantages of having country offices as they played a pivotal role in safeguarding cooperation and partnerships during the pandemic.

Over 25% of DCAF staff today are permanently based in country offices and are instrumental in building and maintaining relationships of trust and cooperation with national authorities, civil society, and local communities. We aim to solidify our in-country presence in the 2025-2030 strategic period and, as a first step, will undertake a study on how to shift toward a more forward-leaning regional approach that effectively responds to fast-changing geopolitics and the realities of the global security environment.

This means investing in new types of partnerships with the private sector, academia, parliamentarians, and thought-leaders including from emerging global powers who can help enhance DCAF's convening power and maintain our capacity to be a transformative force in global security governance.



## Our institutional pillars

To achieve our priorities in the 2025-2030 strategic period, DCAF will rely on its three institutional pillars: people and culture, finance, and governance.

### People and culture

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As a knowledge organization, DCAF's main asset is our people. DCAF strives to attract and retain experienced personnel and considers investment in people to be a priority. It is our people who bring knowledge and innovation, offer expertise, and develop partnerships. Our 200-plus staff members come from over 40 countries with a wide range of experience in security, development, public sector reform, peacebuilding, and corporate services. DCAF staff in headquarters and on the ground intimately understand the national and regional contexts in which we work.

We are committed to providing a healthy working environment, proper remuneration, and professional development opportunities for our staff. We will continue to support a working culture based on trust, teamwork, constructive dialogue, and accountability. We will foster gender equality, diversity, and inclusivity in all forms across the organization. We plan to align talent acquisition with new strategic priorities and needs, and to foster a positive, safe, and stimulating work environment to meet the challenges ahead.

### Finance

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In the last strategic period, DCAF experienced budget fluctuations due to the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts and geopolitical tensions in various regions. Our primary financial objective for the next strategic period will be to achieve greater financial sustainability through optimized use of core funding, balanced budgets, and a sound balance between our core and project funding. We want to gain flexibility and room to manoeuvre to operate sustainably and respond with agility to ever-evolving needs in the volatile environments in which we work.

In the upcoming strategic period, we envisage staying within the same envelope as 2023 at approximately CHF 33-35 million per year. Core funding is the backbone of DCAF's financial resources. It allows us to finance a major part of staff salaries, infrastructure and management costs – and thereby contributes to all DCAF's operational programmes. Core funding enables rapid extrabudgetary response to urgent needs and unanticipated challenges. It can also serve as seed funding for research and development of new programs.

DCAF will continue its efforts in diversifying our funding sources. Focus will be placed on developing a public-private partnership model, and on engaging with donors outside the Euro-Atlantic area. An action plan to broaden our donor base will be put in place to ensure that DCAF's fundraising efforts are coherent and coordinated.

Regarding our existing donors, strategic partnerships involving multi-year funding will be particularly important to increase financial predictability, support the long-term approaches required to bring about sustainable change, and better align DCAF's work with donors' strategic priorities. This is paired with a strong emphasis on results-based management to ensure that DCAF provides value for money to its partners and donors as well as invests effectively to enhance the longer-term impact of our work.

DCAF's flexible funding model with multi-donor pooled funds for specific geographical or thematic areas has proved successful in achieving greater operational agility. They have been extremely effective in mobilizing prompt operational support, but also in promoting coherence and coordination among the donors, alongside sharing of operational and financial risks. This modular and flexible funding model will need to be further supported and developed.

In addition to fundraising efforts, DCAF must seize opportunities to gain efficiency, and we will prioritize the sharing of services and resources with our sister centres at the Maison de la Paix (the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining) in the 2025-2030 strategic period.

**DCAF's flexible funding model with multi-donor pooled funds for geographical or thematic areas has proved successful in achieving greater operational agility. They are also extremely effective in promoting coherence and coordination among donors.**

## Governance

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By joining forces and combining efforts with our members and partners, we will be better equipped to implement the new strategy and move closer to the realization of our vision.

DCAF is a Swiss foundation with a truly global reach. Our Foundation Council brings DCAF exposure to an inclusive and diverse group of key donors and partner countries at the ambassadorial level, supported by a Bureau. Each of DCAF's multi-donor pooled funds has its own governance mechanism. Active involvement of our stakeholders – members of the Foundation Council, the Bureau, ISSAT International Partners Group and other multi-donor pooled funds, as well as the Swiss Comité de Pilotage – will be of critical importance.

We expect all our members and partners to participate more actively in the strategic steering of DCAF: share their ideas, concerns and perspectives about our work; facilitate the development of strategic multi-year partnerships and access to funding; identify opportunities for cooperation; and, through advocacy, raise awareness about DCAF's mission and work.

Membership of the Foundation Council must ensure that DCAF retains a culture of inclusivity and diversity, as well as political access to a growing number of partner countries and institutions. The experience of DCAF's International Partners Group as a convenor of donors should be valorised and, based on the recommendations of DCAF's external evaluation, we are exploring the potential benefits of an external advisory board of experts.

We will also continue to seek opportunities to work more closely with the other Geneva Centres as well as other organizations in International Geneva and the Maison de la Paix to take full advantage of our location and the wealth of opportunities it provides to develop meaningful and innovative partnerships.



# Our commitment to learning

DCAF is committed to continuously improving as a learning organization. Over the 2025-2030 strategy period, we will conduct monitoring and evaluation with the overarching goal to learn, and to be more intentional and better in what we do. Midway through the 2025–2030 strategy period, we will conduct a mid-term review to evaluate progress toward objectives and adapt to changes in the external landscape.

In our view, the ambition of a monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) framework is to ensure that we make an impact and that we bring positive change to the delivery of security and justice to the people. In practice, our commitment to learning means that DCAF will create opportunities and safe spaces for staff to learn, based on evidence, from one another and from our partners. Together with them, we will therefore prioritize reinforcing existing initiatives, alongside investing in the development of our staff, facilitating access to information, and focusing our efforts on holistic, qualitative learning based on strengthened monitoring, evaluation, and accountability frameworks.

## Monitoring

DCAF will continue to allocate MEAL resources to strengthen the organizational structures, systems, and skills required to regularly and reliably track and report progress against our intended outcomes. We will strengthen our operational capacities to implement politically savvy, problem-driven approaches, with tighter feedback loops, to facilitate more adaptive and innovative programming. We will ensure our information management systems are designed to streamline reporting of corporate results according to our donor requirements. We will work with our donors to continue to improve reporting efficiencies and to harmonize reporting in multi-donor funding contexts where possible. Our commitment to gender and intersectionality will also be reflected in our monitoring and reporting systems, particularly with a view to fostering greater inclusivity in our programmatic results.

## Evaluation

DCAF will continue to enhance the organizational capacities required to periodically assess how our strategic interventions have contributed to intended results. Our evaluative approach ensures that we will be able to assess expected outcomes and thus validate the underlying assumptions we make about our impact. To test our causal assumptions and underlying theories of change, we will invest in periodic formative and summative evaluations at project and programme levels, as well as at regional and thematic levels, using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. We will identify and utilize aggregable outcome indicators to assess our contribution to overall impact and innovation. Our commitment to gender and intersectionality will remain prominent in all our evaluative work. We aim to identify the unexpected results of our work and ensure that our evaluative processes do no harm.



We will be cognizant of our impact and answerable for our work with marginalized groups, especially those with additional and intersecting vulnerabilities such as women and youth, as these communities are often at the forefront of our strategies and operational work.

### Accountability

Our monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems enable us to answer to our key stakeholders, strengthening accountability to our performance and the strategic results we have set out to achieve. Our governance structures ensure we remain strategically and financially accountable, particularly to our different institutional donors. We are fully committed to participation and transparency; we are determined to hold management and colleagues accountable at both the institutional and individual levels and will continue to strengthen our oversight frameworks to remain answerable to our staff as well as our partners. We will also strive to be cognizant of our impact and be answerable for our work with marginalized groups, especially those with additional and intersecting vulnerabilities such as women and youth, as these communities are often at the forefront of our strategies and operational work.

### Learning

We recognize learning as a strategic driver of effectiveness and innovation and will continue to strengthen our organizational learning systems to deliver on this strategy. In support of this ambition, we are creating a MEAL hub to strengthen the existing MEAL network across DCAF. This will include developing communities of practice, facilitating evidence sharing, promoting collaboration, improving access to information internally, as well as entering into learning partnerships with others externally. We want to ensure that the lessons learned from our in-country work inform SSG policy, and that our policy research initiatives also inform our operational approaches. We will use our convening power and our ability to facilitate dialogue and exchange to influence wider SSG policy and practice and to enhance our reputation as a centre of excellence and as a thought leader in the field of SSG.





We will continue to evolve and innovate to achieve our vision of a world where democratic security sector governance leads to sustainable peace and development and human dignity for all.

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