Strengthening the SAPS for a safer South Africa

Recommendations for police reform

Justice and Violence Prevention Programme,
Institute for Security Studies

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Many police members do good work and many criminals end up in prisons as a result. We applaud these successes. Nevertheless, since 2012, we have become increasingly concerned by evidence that the South African Police Service’s (SAPS) organisational performance and policing generally in South Africa are in a state of decline.
Introduction

Since 1996, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) has been closely following and analysing crime trends and criminal justice performance in South Africa. During this time, we have come across many dedicated, diligent and capable members of the South African Police Service (SAPS), at all levels of the organisation.

Many police members do good work and many criminals end up in prisons as a result. We applaud these successes. Nevertheless, since 2012, we have become increasingly concerned by evidence that SAPS' organisational performance and policing generally in South Africa are in a state of decline. This means that a far greater impact could have been achieved to reduce crime and improve public safety with the available resources than has been the case for many years.

The most accurate and important indicator of public safety around the world is the murder rate (the number of people murdered per 100 000 of a population). This formula enables policymakers to determine whether the risk of murder is increasing or not, and how this risk changes over time and across different geographic areas.

With the birth of democracy in South Africa, the murder rate declined by 55% until 2012, when the lowest murder rate was recorded. In the 2022/23 financial year, South Africa experienced a 53% increase in the murder rate since 2012, with gender-based violence and violent robberies at unacceptably high levels. Organised crime has become increasingly entrenched, strangling businesses, constraining local economic development and posing an existential threat to our democracy.

Crime is the result of a complex interplay of factors, and when levels are as high as they are in South Africa, no one organisation or sector alone can address it. However, an effective policing capability is vital to enable other organisations and sectors to help reduce it.

The SAPS is a large and complex organisation comprising over 180 000 personnel mostly working from 1 164 police stations located across the whole country. Improving the capability and performance of an organisation this large, and with such a vast geographical footprint is not easy. It will require grappling with complex and difficult organisational change issues.

But for a long time, little serious thought has been given to what needs to be done to strengthen the SAPS. Instead, the common assumption is that the ability of the police to better tackle crime can be solved largely by adding more resources. Indeed, the SAPS will have received an additional 30 000 new recruits between 2022/23 and the end of the 2024/25 financial year.

We believe that more personnel alone will not prevent the further decline of the SAPS. More personnel can only help if they are highly skilled, resourced, motivated and deployed according to regularly assessed evidence-based strategic and operational plans that target specific networks and groups of criminals. This requires an organisational culture characterised by integrity, innovation, agility, transparency and accountability.
Instead, the government’s approach has been that the problems in policing can be fixed by recruiting more police personnel, establishing more task teams, or increasing community involvement through Community Policing Forums (CPFs). But these measures don’t address the key challenges that have resulted in the long-term deterioration of various SAPS capabilities and performance.

Ongoing reports about challenges in police intelligence gathering, forensic capacity, the Central Firearms Registry, and the maintenance of vehicles and other equipment at police stations all point to an organisation with less-than-optimal information and management systems.

The SAPS is failing to achieve its Constitutional mandate to investigate crime. For over a decade the ability to solve criminal cases has declined substantially across most categories. The SAPS 2022/23 Annual Report shows that only 12.4% of the murder cases it investigated were closed as detected – meaning a suspect had been identified. This is a decline of 61% compared to the 31% of murder cases closed as detected in 2011/12. Poor police performance reinforces a vicious cycle, fuelling low levels of public trust in the police, which in turn reduces public cooperation with the SAPS. This partly explains the increase in the murder rate over this period.

Chart 1: SAPS detection rate for murder, 2011/12 – 2022/23

If people who commit murder get away with it, some of them they are likely to continue committing such crimes due to the lack of consequences. The 53% increase in the murder rate between 2012 and 2022/23 translates into almost 12 000 more murder victims in 2022/23 than in 2012. Surprisingly, this situation is not mentioned as a crisis in government documents or speeches, and there is no specific strategy being implemented by the SAPS to ensure the murder rate is reduced.

While there are many honest and disciplined SAPS members, too many of their colleagues are involved in corruption and misconduct. Many SAPS members also suffer from high work-related stress and low job satisfaction, feel that the SAPS is not a good organisation to work for, and have low levels of confidence in their colleagues. This is because a culture of non-compliance with the SAPS code of conduct and regulations has become entrenched and is not being addressed.
The SAPS has vast resources at its disposal – its 2024 budget is R113.6 billion. It is time to focus on how these resources can be used more effectively, to strengthen the SAPS to ensure a safer South Africa. The public must respect the SAPS for its professionalism and the integrity of its members if it is to lead effective responses to crime.

What follows are ISS’ proposals on what needs to be done to professionalise the SAPS so that it can better fulfil its constitutional mandate. These proposals are not a detailed programme for strengthening the police. Rather, they contain priority measures that will be the foundation for creating a more effective and trusted SAPS.

Following the May 2024 elections South Africa is entering a new period in its democracy. There can be little doubt that a focused and sustained programme to strengthen the SAPS must be a priority for the new government. These proposals are based on years of research and analysis of the police by the ISS and others. We believe they provide a basis for the initial steps that should be taken to strengthen policing in South Africa.

**Strategic focus 1: Leadership and professionalisation**

**Recommendation 1: The police minister must provide strategic direction on how to professionalise the SAPS**

- Sections 206(1) and (2) of the Constitution require the minister of police to determine a National Policing Policy in consultation with provincial governments. Most police ministers have neglected this responsibility.

- The Civilian Secretariat for Police, provided for in Section 208 of the Constitution, is required to provide the minister with advice on policy, and to oversee the SAPS. It is unclear whether the secretariat has adequate capacity for these tasks, as police ministers have generally not invested in strengthening it.

**Implementation**

- The person appointed as police minister must be committed to driving a programme of police professionalisation intended to measurably improve police performance.

- The president’s performance agreement with the minister must focus on providing evidence-based policy leadership and rigorous oversight to ensure the measurable professionalisation of the SAPS and strengthen the overall policing system. (This includes the Independent Police Investigative Directorate, CPFs, Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority, etc.)

- As an initial, urgent measure, the minister should formally direct the SAPS to prioritise reducing levels of murder, by focusing on firearm crime and violence as per Recommendation 4 below. The minister’s performance agreement should include improvements in detection rates for violent and firearm-related crimes.

- The minister will need to prioritise steps to strengthen the capacity for policy development support that he or she has access to. In the short term this should involve bringing in outside assistance. In the longer term, the capacity of the Civilian Secretariat for Police to perform this function should be strengthened. The relationship between the SAPS and CSP must be
strengthened and the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) should be brought into the policy-making process.

- Within six months of taking office, the minister should issue a clear and bold National Policing Policy that provides a strategic programme to measurably improve police performance. Priority should be given to improving current SAPS management structures and systems. An independent review (such as that undertaken for Eskom) should identify inefficiencies that prevent key organisational shortcomings from being addressed over long periods.

- Given the burden facing the current SAPS top leadership structure in managing the SAPS, and challenges facing the Civilian Secretariat for Police, it is recommended that the minister take advice from experts in organisational change management and other fields relevant to police reform.

- Following the receipt of National Policing Policy directives from the new minister, the SAPS should be required to provide a clear plan for implementing those directives. The minister should ensure that the SAPS’ implementation plan is independently and rigorously assessed for the impact it produces in various parts of South Africa. The SAPS should review its performance indicators and ensure that they align with the criminal justice system as a whole.

- Parliament’s Portfolio Committee on Police should be briefed at least biannually on the progress being made with implementation of policies and reforms.

**Recommendation 2: Strengthen SAPS leadership and management**

- Capable leadership is necessary for the SAPS to overcome the challenges it faces, to strengthen its effectiveness and to professionalise. The SAPS’ current management structures and systems are inadequate for identifying and addressing key organisational shortcomings.

- The core SAPS leadership structure is the Board of Commissioners, which comprises the 27 most senior SAPS officials. This structure in addition to those that report to it appear ill suited to improving the SAPS’ performance and its organisational culture.

**Implementation**

- The SAPS national commissioner should urgently create an executive management system based on sound organisational principles aimed at promoting efficiency and effectiveness to ensure effective decision making and accountability.

- The minister should ensure that independent expertise is part of the above process and reviews the performance of the new management system every two years.

- The Constitution requires the president and provincial executives (Members of the Executive Council) to be involved in the appointment of the SAPS national and provincial commissioners. All other senior management appointments should be made only by the SAPS national commissioner on the recommendations of an independently chaired panel following a transparent, competitive and merit-based process.
Recommendation 3: Build a more positive and professional police identity

- When it was established in the mid-1990s, the SAPS was renamed as a ‘police service’ to distinguish it from the apartheid-era ‘police force’. Measures to change the identity of the police organisation included introducing new uniforms and changing the colour of police vehicles. But poor service delivery, corruption and incidents of police brutality have tarnished the name of the SAPS. Due to negative community attitudes and tough working environments, many SAPS members now suffer from low morale. They have little confidence that community members respect them as police professionals.

- South Africa has high levels of violent crime and police work in the country is dangerous, mainly because of widespread firearm violence. Each year, too many police officials are killed on duty (in 2023/24 this was 36, with 73 killed off-duty).

- Police are authorised by law and trained to protect themselves and others against violence using the necessary force. But statements from politicians and others sometimes create confusion about what principles should apply when police officials use lethal force.

- SAPS members suffer from high levels of work-related stress and are vulnerable to various occupational health risks that affect them, their families, and their colleagues.

- The SAPS Code of Conduct and Ethics provides a broad framework of values, but it is also vague in many respects. It needs to be updated so that it more concisely articulates a set of core values, and speaks more directly to SAPS members about their professional identity and what it means to serve in the SAPS.

Implementation

- An essential element of building public trust in the SAPS is building greater self-respect within the SAPS. Pride in wearing the SAPS insignia and uniform must be restored. This will enable the SAPS to be seen more positively by potential recruits so that employment in the SAPS becomes a career of choice.

- One element of this process should be the adoption of a succinct new SAPS oath or declaration that SAPS members commit to, which should include the following:
  - Dignity and respect – SAPS members conduct themselves in a manner that is based on treating members of the public with respect, and that promotes respect for the SAPS.
  - Service to the public – people who join the SAPS do so because they want to serve the community.
  - Professional support and integrity – SAPS members will support their colleagues, but not at the expense of professional policing standards.

- The SAPS needs to strengthen its leadership development and succession programme based on best practices internationally.

- The president should appoint the future SAPS national commissioner from a shortlist provided by an independent panel established to assess applicants. Assessment criteria for the SAPS national commissioner and provincial commissioners should be clear and comparable with international good practices on appointments of top leaders in large police organisations.
• Protection of life – foregrounding police safety and reducing unnecessary use of lethal force.

• Learning, growth, development – SAPS members will commit to learning and growth as part of improving policing in South Africa.

• Risk – SAPS members will recognise ‘risk’ situations where they or their colleagues need support, whether in their professional or private lives. They will seek support for themselves and, where appropriate, encourage their colleagues to do the same.

• Each of the above values must be practically applied to all policing functions. These values should also guide the selection of new recruits, the content of training programmes, daily management and supervision, formal performance management and discipline processes.

• As part of building a new professional identity, a participatory process must be initiated, to hear the voices of SAPS members on key questions such as how they would like to be treated and how they think the SAPS should change.

Strategic focus 2: Serious violent crime

Recommendation 4: Reduce murder by focusing on firearm crime and violence

• Firearm crime and violence includes all criminal acts involving the use, or threatened use, of firearms. Firearm violence accounts for more than 40% of murders in South Africa and 37% of murders of women, and is one of the main drivers of recent major increases in murder rates. In addition to murder, roughly 70% of attempted murders, many aggravated robberies and cases of violence linked to gangs or other criminal groups involve firearms. Multiple murders (cases that involve multiple victims in one incident) overwhelmingly involve firearms.

• It is critical for the SAPS to respond effectively to the crisis of firearm crime and violence. Though there are many crime issues that deserve priority attention, removing firearms will make South Africa safer for everyone, overall. It is where the SAPS can make a big difference to the crime problem, if it diligently implements a focused firearm violence reduction strategy.

• By reducing firearm-related murders and other crimes, a focus on firearm-related crime can both build police morale and improve public confidence and trust in the SAPS. It can demonstrate how a more effective SAPS will work.

Implementation

• Reducing firearm-related crime should be the initial focus of an SAPS strategy to substantially reduce murder. This does not replace other important priorities, but is a necessary short- to medium-term priority to demonstrably improve public safety and build confidence in the SAPS.

• To support the strategy, the National Prosecuting Authority should be requested to prioritise the prosecution of firearm violence and other related firearm offences, such as the possession of illegal firearms and ammunition.
The SAPS should accurately map all crimes linked to the use of firearms. This would enable police responses to be better targeted, perpetrators identified, and sources of illegal firearms disrupted more effectively.

Dedicated firearm units with adequate intelligence support should be established in all provinces, with coordination at national level. Their key performance measure must be a reduction in shootings, murders and attempted murders with firearms and all firearm-related crimes.

The initial focus should be on addressing firearm-related crimes in the 10 geographic areas where firearm-related crime is most concentrated.

A component of the strategy should focus on the inkabi (hitman) industry with special priority given to the assassination of political office bearers, criminal justice officials and corruption whistleblowers.

Cash-in-transit gangs and other organised criminal groups equipped with automatic weapons, who are sometimes mobile and carry out attacks in different areas, should also be a focus of special SAPS attention.

Clear measures to address problems facing the Central Firearms Registry must be implemented. Priorities should be to rigorously address corruption in SAPS firearm management, fully digitise the system, and substantially enhance oversight and accountability for lost firearms.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen crime investigation and rationalise other police capabilities

The SAPS is the national police service of South Africa. It includes several divisions and components, comprising police officials with varied roles. Around half (54% in 2023) of SAPS personnel are uniformed members in the Visible Policing and Operations Division, and just over 20% are detectives (see Chart 2). There are also crime intelligence personnel, and those responsible for VIP protection. Just under one-fifth (18%) are non-uniformed administrative staff, employed under the Public Service Act.

Over the years, various new SAPS units have been established on an ad hoc basis, often in a manner that duplicates existing SAPS capacities. As a result, the SAPS itself is internally fragmented. One example of this is that although the Hawks are supposed to be responsible for investigating serious organised crime, there are also SAPS national and provincial Organised Crime Units that report to national and provincial commissioners, and not to the Hawks.

The investigation of crime requires effective skills for evidence collection and presentation, particularly in cases involving complex forms of corruption, and financial and organised crime. Advanced skills are required to enable the SAPS to perform crime data analysis and conduct successful cyber forensic investigations.

The Crime Intelligence Division of the SAPS is not performing effectively, is largely exempt from accountability, presents a major risk for police corruption, and is a potential threat to national security. While some progress has been made in investigating gang leaders in the Western Cape, and other crime kingpins, it’s unclear to
what extent the longstanding challenges facing the Division have been addressed. The evidence presented at the Zondo Commission also highlighted that it has been prone to irregular appointment practices.

• Reliance on the vague concept of ‘visible policing’ is not adequate to describe the role that station-based uniformed members should play to prevent crime and build public trust. The role of these members in addressing crime is not effectively understood or measured. There is little evidence that many of the tactics used, such as random roadblocks, patrols and searches, prevent or reduce crime.

• In reaction to the July 2021 unrest, which followed the arrest of former president Jacob Zuma and resulted in the death of 353 people and an estimated R50-billion in damage to property and infrastructure, the SAPS dramatically expanded the number of Public Order Policing personnel. But mass unrest of this type is not a permanent feature of the South African policing environment. Retaining such a large permanent Public Order Policing capacity is not a cost-effective and sustainable approach to using SAPS resources.

• There are also inefficiencies and duplication of functions between the various SAPS tactical units responsible for medium- to high-risk operations, such as the Tactical Response Teams and the National Intervention Unit.

• Government and the SAPS have prioritised VIP safety above the safety of communities whose experience of violent crime has worsened.

Chart 2: Distribution of SAPS personnel by division as at 31 March 2023

Implementation

• The key priority of government in the next five years should be to considerably strengthen the investigation of crime. This requires investment in strengthening the Hawks and SAPS detective function, and ensuring that these are effectively supported by crime intelligence particularly at the national, provincial and district level.
• The Hawks must be expanded considerably, to effectively investigate serious organised crime, serious corruption, and serious financial crime. The mandates and location of all specialised investigation task teams should be reviewed to ensure that there is no duplication and clear reporting lines.

• An in-depth review of the SAPS detective division should be conducted that is orientated towards improving the performance of SAPS crime investigations. This should examine the functioning of the division, including the approach to resource allocation and case prioritisation, case supervision, and the impact of the establishment of specialised units and task teams on efforts to address priority crimes.

• In light of the findings of the Zondo Commission, an audit of promotions and appointments in the SAPS Crime Intelligence Division should be conducted to identify appointments and promotions that may have been irregular, and propose remedies if irregularities are found.

• Restructuring the crime intelligence function should be considered, by locating some intelligence functions directly under units involved in organised crime investigations as well as the SAPS Anti-Corruption Unit and other specialised units. Analysis of crime patterns, open-source data gathering and analysis and offender profiling should be a separate function, and shouldn't be covered by the same level of secrecy as covert ‘intelligence’ gathering.

• Over the next two financial years the SAPS, supported by the Civilian Secretariat, should carry out an investigation into the reconfiguration and rationalisation of specialist components such as the POP, TRT, NIU and VIP Protection.

Strategic focus 3: Police corruption and accountability

Recommendation 6: Improve public trust in the SAPS by reducing police corruption and criminality

• Police corruption, criminality and misconduct are widespread. This contributes significantly to low levels of public trust in the SAPS and high levels of organised and other crime.

• Current SAPS integrity management and disciplinary systems do not adequately maintain discipline or prevent misconduct and criminality among SAPS officials.

• One indicator of the lack of police professionalism is SAPS members’ inability to appropriately exercise professional police discretion, as reflected in the cost of civil claims against the SAPS, which are largely linked to wrongful arrest. Almost R650 million was paid out to victims of unlawful police conduct as a result of civil claims in 2022/23 alone.

• There are too many senior SAPS leaders facing serious allegations or questions about their integrity. While some have been dismissed or are facing criminal prosecution, some remain in their positions long after allegations are in the public realm with little action being taken against them, further undermining public confidence in the SAPS. When police officers face public allegations of wrongdoing, it is no longer an internal matter but an issue that speaks directly to the public’s trust in the police. SAPS leadership must address these matters quickly and transparently to help build public trust in the SAPS.
Implementation

• The SAPS must establish an effective, well-resourced National Anti-Corruption Unit that is protected from interference. This unit should have no less capability and more independence than the SAPS Anti-Corruption Unit that existed between 1996 and 2001. It was closed by former SAPS National Commissioner Jackie Selebi, who was later convicted of corruption.

• The SAPS must establish an effective internal discipline system comprising dedicated disciplinary investigators, prosecutors and presiding officers. These dedicated disciplinary officials should expedite cases involving allegations of serious misconduct by police officials.

• The SAPS Act and disciplinary regulations should be amended to ensure that police officials who are convicted of criminal offences are immediately dismissed from the SAPS.

• As an urgent response to the allegations of procurement-related corruption in the SAPS, the president should direct the Special Investigating Unit to identify vulnerabilities in the current SAPS procurement system and recommend reforms to the police minister.

• Procurement information on the companies that are awarded tenders and the amounts should be routinely and speedily published in a dedicated ‘procurement’ section of the SAPS website.

Recommendation 7: Update the SAPS Act

• The SAPS Act was passed in 1995, before the Constitution was finalised. It is based on the interim Constitution and shaped by the context of transitional South Africa in the 1990s.

• The Constitution was also passed at a time when there was concern that apartheid police officials would resist the process of democratic transformation. As a result, it includes provisions for a police minister to provide directives to the SAPS. However, no constraints were placed on such directives. In practice it facilitates inappropriate political interference in SAPS operations and appointments to the detriment of the organisation.

• The Constitution allows room for legislation (the SAPS Act) to shape how the national police service is structured, operates and is governed. The process of amending the SAPS Act should be used to support the process of reforming the SAPS into a professional, 21st century police service.

• Current legislative provisions related to municipal police do not provide for effective coordination between the SAPS and Metro Police (in areas where they exist). There is a need for meaningful coordination at both strategic and operational levels, to ensure efficient use of police resources.

Implementation

• The SAPS Act must be amended to clarify the minister’s role and to constrain inappropriate ministerial interference in both SAPS operations and in appointing senior police officers. All directives from the police minister (and any other political office bearers) to any SAPS officials must be given in writing, and the directives compiled and submitted to Parliament annually to promote transparency.
• An amended SAPS Act should also prohibit the appointment of any person to any position in the SAPS without an assessment process that evaluates that person’s likely ability to fulfil the requirements of the post.

• In metropolitan areas, the SAPS Act should provide for creation of a command structure to enable better-coordinated deployment of SAPS and Metro Police personnel. Provision should be made for input from the mayor’s office into setting the policing priorities in the metropolitan area.

• The SAPS Act should address other critical current questions such as the powers of provincial governments in respect of the SAPS, the framework for police-community partnerships, and improving SAPS accountability (see also Recommendation 6).

• Moreover, consideration should be given to substantially enhancing SAPS accountability. Consideration should be given to clauses promoting vicarious liability of supervisors for the conduct of those over which they have authority, the establishment and resourcing of the Integrity Management Component, the Anti-Corruption Unit, and the Internal Disciplinary System. This is to prevent possible efforts to weaken or shut down these vital functions.

Strategic focus 4: Data, technology and modernisation

Recommendation 8: Better information technology and cybersecurity capabilities, and more effective analysis of crime data

• The SAPS faces multiple equipment and technology challenges, which are amplified by the organisation’s limited ability to adapt to the major technology advances taking place globally. Nevertheless, the SAPS is beginning to introduce new forms of technology to support more effective policing. These include surveillance cameras and automated number plate recognition, closed-circuit television, drones, body worn cameras and dashboard cameras, gunshot detection technology, and digital fingerprint enrolment devices to capture fingerprints.

• At the same time, the SAPS appears not to have the organisational capability to effectively assess technological needs, identify and procure technology to address these needs, and ensure such technology is maintained and used properly.

Implementation

• A high-level strategic review of the SAPS’ approach to identifying, procuring and using technology should be conducted. The review should provide guidance on technologies and equipment that could be declared obsolete, on improving maintenance, and about new types of technologies the SAPS should prioritise using in line with its strategic objectives and operational requirements.

• This review should guide the SAPS in setting priorities for strengthening the introduction by the SAPS of new technologies.

• To support more effective use of technology, the capacity of SAPS senior leadership to appreciate the role of various technologies and the requirements for them to be effectively used and maintained must be enhanced.
• All station-based SAPS commanders should be able to use the available technology to enhance policing operational effectiveness and accountability. For example, the automatic vehicle location system should be monitored by station commanders to ensure that SAPS vehicles are being used appropriately.

• All applications to join the SAPS should be online, and initial selections should be based on the ability to use online digital devices, follow basic written instructions, and upload documents. This is to ensure a minimum standard of literacy and technical competency of all new recruits. Those shortlisted for recruitment should be assessed in person for these skills before acceptance as a trainee.

Recommendation 9: Establish a centre of excellence on data analysis to support evidence-based policing

• In other countries, data on crime is increasingly used in analysing crime problems and trends and for identifying offenders. The SAPS lags behind in modern crime analysis, and doesn’t have enough skilled data analysts. The extent to which SAPS operations are effectively guided and assessed by reliable data and rigorous analysis is unclear.

• Whether the information and data available to the SAPS in identifying and addressing organisational challenges is guiding leadership, is also unclear. (For example, the ability to identify the reasons for annual detection rate declines, and to effectively address these.)

Implementation

• The SAPS national commissioner should establish a centre in SAPS headquarters to coordinate and lead research and analysis using an evidence-based policing approach. The centre should use research to identify practical options for improving policing and evaluate new police methods and tactics. The current SAPS Crime Registrar and SAPS Research Component should be integrated into this centre.

• The new centre should routinely provide analysis and recommendations to SAPS executive management structures and to the national Board of Commissioners to inform senior decision making on responses to crime.

• The initial focus of the new centre should be mapping and other research to strengthen SAPS responses to firearm crime and violence.

• In parts of the country where serious violence is often not reported to police, the SAPS should establish data-sharing partnerships with hospitals and other relevant institutions to strengthen the quality of data on violence trends (in addition to what is gathered from police stations).

• Key stations in different settings around the country should be identified as ‘innovation hubs’ where new policing projects and pilots are tested to determine requirements for effectiveness and impact.
Recommendation 10: Modernise SAPS recruitment and training

- SAPS recruitment is based mainly on the intake of large numbers of people who meet the minimum requirements (e.g. having a matric certificate). This reliance on mass recruitment is outdated and inadequate, as it does not deliver sufficient recruits with the types of skills the SAPS needs to respond to the current crime context. The skills required by the police include, among others:
  - Competencies for investigation of complex forms of corruption and financial and other organised crime
  - Data analysis
  - Digital forensics capabilities
  - Management and coordination competencies to drive local crime prevention initiatives
  - Advanced firearm skills to help provide armed response to medium- to high-risk situations in line with principles of minimum force and de-escalation
  - Skills in managing and maintaining equipment, technology, and infrastructure
  - Erratic and intermittent mass recruitment of thousands of new recruits undermines the operation of systems for reliable selection, vetting and effective basic training. To establish effective recruitment mechanisms, the SAPS must be able to anticipate – in advance – the scale of recruitment it must prepare for each year.

Implementation

- The minister, in consultation with Treasury, must establish a framework in which targets for annual SAPS recruitment are set over the three-year Medium Term Expenditure Framework planning cycle. This will give the SAPS Human Resources Management and Human Resource Development divisions reasonable advance notice of the number of recruits they will be expected to hire and train.
- An increasing share of SAPS members should be recruited for specific skilled roles. The SAPS must start focusing on recruitment of appropriately skilled graduates from universities and technical colleges, potentially including offering SAPS scholarships for tertiary students in relevant fields. The SAPS will need to offer graduate recruits suitable career pathing to develop and retain the specialised skills it needs.
- The SAPS should seek to be seen as an employer of choice rather than an employer of last resort. It should attract high-calibre, skilled people, and the conditions of employment should be adjusted so that employees with key skills prefer to stay in the SAPS, reducing the ‘brain drain’ to the private sector.
- A capability review of the SAPS human resource management function must be conducted urgently to identify the internal changes needed for the SAPS to develop and implement human resource practices that will better support the creation of a more professional SAPS.
- A similar review should be conducted of SAPS training.
- The minister should request tertiary institutions to assess the police-specific qualifications they offer. These assessments should examine whether those qualifications adequately
support development of the type of policing capabilities that will be required by the SAPS in future.

• All SAPS members undergoing training, including basic recruit training, must be independently assessed to ensure that skills have been adequately understood and can be practically implemented.

Strategic focus 5: Auxiliary policing

Recommendation 11: Coordinate various policing efforts for maximum effect

• Section 199(3) of the South African Constitution says that ‘armed organisations or services may be established only in terms of national legislation.’ There are already large numbers of firearms in South Africa. Further proliferation of firearms and armed organisations will worsen crime and violence.

• In addition to the SAPS and Metro Police, there are multiple role players involved in providing auxiliary types of policing in South Africa. These include private security companies, traffic officers employed by provincial, local and national government, and civilian groups involved in forms of policing such as local patrols, guard groups and neighbourhood watch. Since 2023, the Gauteng Provincial Government has thousands of crime wardens, despite questions about the legality of their establishment.

• Private security companies largely provide security and guarding services to businesses, government departments, and residents of more affluent parts of the country. They can play an important role in discouraging crime and enabling residents to feel safer. In most instances, private security guards are unarmed (although some may be supported by armed reaction units). Private security services are not as widely used in less affluent parts of South Africa.

Implementation

• New armed organisations tasked with policing functions should not be established. Armed policing services should be provided by the SAPS and the various Metro Police departments.

• National government should provide a policy and legislative framework for the establishment, coordination and regulation of all types of auxiliary policing organisations, particularly in areas not serviced by private security. This framework should also clarify the role and responsibilities of the SAPS in respect of auxiliary policing organisations.

• The public safety and reassurance function that results from consistent police visibility in an area should be performed by auxiliary services in order to free up trained, professional SAPS officials to do more skilled policing work.
Conclusion

The transformation of the apartheid-era South African Police to a police service, as part of South Africa’s transition to democracy in the 1990s, is recognised internationally as an example of effective police reform. However, since 2012 in particular, there is clear evidence that the effectiveness of the SAPS has deteriorated. High levels of police corruption, criminality and ill-discipline have contributed to a substantial decline in public trust in the police.

This decline can be reversed. A more effective SAPS, that better uses its vast resources to improve public safety, is entirely possible. This report aims to promote a discussion about what a programme of SAPS renewal should look like. Shifting an organisation as large and complex as the SAPS onto a different, more positive, trajectory will not be a quick and easy task. It will require strengthening specific capacities within the SAPS, including the leadership, integrity management, crime investigation, and human resource functions, in a manner that supports the incremental strengthening of the SAPS as a police service.

One critical aspect of this is that the SAPS must use its resources in a more targeted manner with a focus on bringing repeat violent offenders to justice. A primary indicator should be evidence that SAPS efforts are clearly contributing to a falling murder rate. A useful starting point for revitalising SAPS responses to crime will be to target firearm crime and violence.

Organised crime is strangling our economy and sowing fear in many communities. As with serious violent crime, the leaders behind the main organised crime networks constitute a small proportion of the population. Disrupting organised criminal networks requires the targeted use of specialised intelligence, forensic and investigative capabilities to trace illicit goods and money flows, and ensure that these kingpins end up in prison. These capabilities already exist to some extent in the SAPS. But they need to be strengthened through targeted measures aimed at ensuring that the good work that many SAPS members are doing is effectively supported and replicated.

It is widely recognised that reductions in levels of crime and violence are required in order to provide an enabling environment for critical economic and social improvements in South Africa. A growing economy that reduces poverty, unemployment and inequality is not possible when criminals rule the streets and communities are wracked with fear and despair.

The SAPS already has many skilled, experienced, dedicated and honest women and men who understand policing and seek to improve the safety of the communities they serve. Moreover, there are many community, business and civil society groups and academics in South Africa are willing to offer their support to the police.

A better, safer South Africa is possible. But this requires that those with authority and the Constitutional mandate to reduce crime recognise the need for urgent measures that can create a trusted SAPS made up of members recognised for their professionalism and integrity.

Urgent measures are needed to create a trusted SAPS made up of members recognised for their professionalism and integrity.
About this report
After more than a decade of rising murder rates, improving public safety is critical for the country's future. The government should prioritise a targeted programme of reform that measurably improves policing over the coming five years. Based on three decades of analysis of crime and policing in South Africa, this report provides recommendations in five strategic focus areas.

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