Enhancing Diversity in the Police Workforce
Challenges and Opportunities

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This article focuses on workforce diversity within European police organizations. Historically, the police force has been known to be white, male, politically conservative and heterosexual, a perception which made it difficult for women, ethnic and racial minorities to consider a career in policing. With the implementation of equal opportunity legislation and changes towards multiculturalism, some police organizations aim at recruiting a more diverse force to improve their relations with the community. Studies on police diversity have shown that when the police are representative of the communities they serve, this increases public trust, legitimacy and operational effectiveness. The barriers to enhancing diversity are recruitment, selection and retention. For effective diversity management, this article recommends that police organizations modify recruitment strategies to encourage women and people with a migration background to apply and publish diversity data to facilitate monitoring. More, offer language classes to promising candidates who show minor weaknesses in the working language but bring other language skills. Further, provide police equipment, like handguns, that are adapted to female police officers hand sizes, offer tailored skill-building training to women and flexible working hours. Finally yet importantly, a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination must be implemented and an inclusive police culture that respects diversity must be established.

Based on the findings, a set of recommendations for police organizations seeking to enhance the diversity of their workforce is provided. Diversity in this article is defined as the inclusion of people of different gender as well as different ethnic and racial backgrounds in police organizations.

1. Why is workforce diversity important for the police?
Workforce diversity can be a sensitive topic for many police organizations and yet cannot be ignored. As society changes and becomes more diverse and multicultural, the police that serve it need to evolve and adapt as well. Diversity helps the police to understand the security needs of all members of a diverse society and to respond to these needs effectively. Research confirms that when the public perceives the police as representative of the community in terms of gender, ethnic and racial diversity, the police are considered trustworthy and legitimate. Furthermore, a diverse police force is more responsive of internal and external challenges, more aware of discrimination and more open to change. All these aspects contribute to greater accountability and operational effectiveness.

2. Data and information on police workforce diversity in European countries
There is no clear threshold for “diversity”. At the very least, senior police leaders need to know the demography of the communities they serve and understand how representative their organization is of the local population. In the Swiss context, for example, data provided in 2017 shows that 50.4% of...
the Swiss population are women and 37.2%\(^2\) have a migration background, of which around one third are Swiss citizens (13.5% in total).

Although some police organizations in countries such as the UK and the Netherlands have implemented diversity policies, the level of diversity within police organizations across Europe as a whole is still low.\(^5\) According to a 2012 study, women continue to represent a small percentage of uniformed and armed police officers in Europe (Table 1):

In 2006, the British Association for Women in Policing (BAWP) suggested that a target for female police officers of 35% is both feasible and necessary in order to achieve gender diversity in police organizations.\(^6\)

**British Association for Women in Policing (BAWP)**

The BAWP is a national organization founded in 1987 and its work is committed to achieving gender equality in policing. They aim at raising awareness about female police officers’ concerns and providing their perspective for possible solutions. BAWP offers a network of professional contacts, mentoring programs and contributes to the development of members through professional development days. In 2001, the BAWP played an active role in developing “The Gender Agenda” which is today used by the British Government. The BAWP also collaborates with other police associations, such as the National Black Police Association, the Gay Police Association, the National Disabled Police Association, the National Transgender Police Association and the National Association of Muslim Police in order to identify and address concerns that affect women and other underrepresented police officers.

In most European countries, women were not allowed to join the uniformed and armed police force until the 1970’s. In the 1980’s many police organizations in Europe changed their recruitment approaches to reach more women. Equal employment opportunity legislation and increased societal interest in gender equality fueled these advancements.\(^8\) In the context of policing, gender equality means that women and men have equal opportunities in the provision, management and oversight of the institution and that the different security needs of women, men, girls, and boys are addressed. In Switzerland, the Federal Act on Gender Equality (1995)\(^9\) fosters the integration of gender equality in organizations.

Gender equality in the police workforce is imperative because women bring different talents and skills. Research on women in policing has underlined some primary valuable qualities that female police officers bring to the workforce and these are:

- Female police officers bring additional knowledge in understanding and responding to the different security needs of diverse members in a community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of female police officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England and Wales</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>29%(^1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>28.9%(^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>28.6%(^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>22.5%(^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>18%(^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>14.5%(^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>14.3%(^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>14.2%(^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain (National Police)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>12.4%(^4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Percentage of uniformed and armed female police officers in selected European countries

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7 https://www.bawp.org/.
• Female police officers report violent crimes against women and domestic violence cases more frequently. More, in sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) cases, a victim might feel more comfortable speaking to a woman and having not enough female police officers available will affect police investigation.

• Female police officers are less likely to use excessive force, appear less authoritarian in their approach to policing and make larger use of their interpersonal skills to defuse violent situations. These qualities improve organizational culture and increase public trust.

Regarding the ethnic and racial background of police officers in Europe, there is not much information available and countries apply their own data collection policies. France, for instance, maintains a public policy model that does not collect statistics on race, ethnicity or religion. On the other hand, data from the Niedersachsen Police (Germany) showed that 3.2% of police officers in 2014 were members of ethnic minorities. The police of England and Wales composed of 6% Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) police officers in 2017. In the Netherlands, 25% of new police cadets in 2017 had a migration background. This high percentage is credited to the work of the Dutch National Expertise Centre on Diversity (LECD), an independent evaluation center founded in 2001 with the mandate to assess, monitor and support the implementation of diversity management within the Dutch police.

Studies on ethnic and racial diversity within police organizations in many European countries have shown that, as European societies become more multicultural, the police continue to lag behind in terms of the representation of police officers with a migration background.

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Box 2: Recruitment policies and diversity: the case of the Niedersachsen Police

In Niedersachsen, about 17.8% of the population has a migration background. The Niedersachsen Police aims at recruiting more diverse applicants through the advertisement campaign headline: “We are looking for policemen and policewomen with a migration background”. Due to these changes in recruitment approaches, the Niedersachsen Police was able to increase the share of applicants with a migration background from 9% to 17% between 2008 and 2013. The Niedersachsen Police subsequently accepted 11.3% out of the 17% ethnic minority applicants. Even though the overall percentage of police officers with a migration background is still low (3.2%), the modified diversity management strategy has shown some success.

3. Challenges in advancing gender, racial and ethnic diversity in the police

According to a 2016 study conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and a 2018 study by the British Police

National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)\textsuperscript{18}, the main challenges to workforce diversity within police organizations include recruitment, selection and retention. Studies reported that European police forces have historically been majority white, male, politically conservative and heterosexual. This public perception makes it difficult to attract women as well as ethnic and racial minorities to a career as a police officer. In addition, the historical legacy of excluding women and minority applicants means that today many police organizations are struggling to increase diversity. Moreover, it was observed that police organizations tend to select male police officers over women more frequently because of biased perceptions that men can do a better job.\textsuperscript{19}

Regarding ethnic and racial diversity recruitment, a study in the Norwegian Police Service (NPS) highlighted that some young citizens with a migration background who were interested in a policing career ended up not applying because they feared they were not welcomed due to their ethnic background.\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, research underlined that language proficiency requirements play a critical factor in the selection process. The Hamburg Police Academy found a way to overcome this barrier through a point system, which gives credit for speaking other languages to candidates who lack German language proficiency. This increased the chances of candidates with a migration background of being selected and has led to an increase in the numbers of Turkish Germans in the force. The academy then provides German classes to these police cadets in order to enable them to succeed in their work.\textsuperscript{21}

A further study conducted in the United States pointed out that during the police application screening process, black applicants were more likely to be disqualified for making minor mistakes in their application and written examination in comparison to similar qualified, non-black applicants.\textsuperscript{22} Although this study was conducted in the United States, European police organizations need to be aware that implicit biases against black applicants may affect their selection practices. Implicit biases can also apply to gender. For example, police organizations that issue single, large-size models of handguns to all officers\textsuperscript{23} put female candidates at an unfair disadvantage, as it is harder for them to pull the trigger due to their smaller hand-size, thus undermining their chances of passing the selection test.

Furthermore, police organizations must consider intersectional factors and understand how sexism, racism and homophobia are interlinked and these interconnected forms of discrimination lead to unequal power relations between different members of the police workforce. For example, a study on female ethnic minority police officers in the Dutch Police showed that female ethnic minority police officers are subject to additional forms of discrimination, contributing to their underrepresentation at senior levels.\textsuperscript{24} The presence of intersectional forms of discrimination was also confirmed in a study on gender and sexuality within the Berlin Police Force, where unequal treatment and discrimination towards women, ethnic minorities, lesbian or gay police officers created additional challenges for them in the workplace, thus leading to higher turnover rates.\textsuperscript{25}

In addition, some studies suggest that female police officers experience higher levels of stress due to sexual harassment and gender bias\textsuperscript{26} and these

Enforcing an inclusive police culture through mutual respect and equal participation at all levels is more meaningful and a better contributor to diversity, which in the long run will attract diverse applicants.

4. Swiss Police and diversity management

The Swiss Confederation calls for all organizations to meet legal requirements for non-discriminatory hiring practices. Some Swiss police organizations, e.g. the Zurich City Police Department, have implemented diversity management in their strategic planning. However, there is a lack of publicly available data, broken down by canton, on the percentage of female police officers or police officers with a migration background in Switzerland. Accepting applicants who have a C permit or are in the process of naturalization might be a possibility for Swiss police organizations aiming to strengthen diversity. This is what police corps in the cantons of Basel Stadt, Schwyz, Geneva and Neuchâtel have done. The need to increase the number of female police officers has also gained importance. On average, about 22% of police officers are female in Switzerland, but they continue to remain largely underrepresented in higher ranks.

Policing in Switzerland is regulated by each canton independently, which explains why operational differences and contrasting attitudes towards diversity management exist. Swiss police organizations seeking to enhance workforce diversity can implement their own policies and gather and publish data on the makeup of their forces, disaggregated by gender, race and ethnic origin. This will allow for the drafting and monitoring of diversity policies and for improving recruitment strategies.

5. How can police organizations further improve diversity management?

Police organizations aiming to manage diversity better and want to attract women and candidates with a migration background should develop targeted recruitment strategies. For instance, job advertisements that outline that applications from women and people with a migration background are welcomed and encouraged will attract more diverse applicants. Further, police organizations can offer language classes to promising candidates who show minor weaknesses in the working language but bring other language skills, as has been done in the Hamburg Police Academy. Concerning gender equality, it is crucial to offer tailored

Championing diversity in the Scottish Police

In order to recruit a more diverse police workforce and to raise awareness about employment opportunities for ethnic minorities and other underrepresented groups, the Police of Scotland launched the “Positive Action Team” that offers support and mentoring to people from underrepresented groups who consider a career as police officers. On their website, they state that diversity is valued within their workforce and promoted under the Equality Act 2010. The Police of Scotland further included hijab as a uniform option to attract Muslim women. More, in 2017 they were recognized as Stonewall Diversity Champion and as one of the top 20 employers for LGBT people in the UK.

Box 3: Championing diversity in the Scottish Police

28 www.scotland.police.uk/recruitment/diversity/
31 Eidgenössisches Personalamt. “Diversity Management.”
skill-building programs to women interested in leadership positions in order to enhance their career opportunities. Moreover, equipment such as handguns should be adapted for use by female police officers who have smaller hands on average. In addition, offering part-time and flexible working hours to police officers with family responsibilities increases the possibility that more women will stay in the force or that potential female candidates with children will consider a career in policing. At the same time, a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment and racial discrimination, or other forms of discrimination needs to be implemented as well as robust complaint mechanisms. Another critical point is the inclusion of training modules on gender, ethnic and racial diversity, as well as intercultural competence in the police academy and police leadership programs. It can be beneficial to have internal diversity training provided by external organizations or consultants, because they bring independent perspectives and expert knowledge.

In conclusion, policing in today’s society has become more complicated for police officers and skills requirements have increased. The police are faced with the challenge of providing a better security to diverse communities and of responding to new forms of criminality in an era of increasing globalization and rapid technological progress. Therefore, new and innovative approaches to policing are necessary. If police organizations are willing to adapt to changing societies by recruiting diverse officers, they will experience significant benefits in the areas of organizational development, community relations, external representation and operational effectiveness.

Bibliography


**Résumé**

**Défis et opportunités liés à la diversification des effectifs policiers**

L'article se concentre sur la diversité des effectifs au sein des organisations policières, au niveau européen. Historiquement, les forces de police étaient principalement constituées d’hommes blancs, conservateurs et hétérosexuels, rendant plus difficile pour les femmes ou les représentant·e·s de minorités ethniques d’envisager une carrière dans la police. Suite à la mise en place de législations destinées à offrir des opportunités égales à toutes et tous et grâce à une plus grande ouverture au pluralisme culturel, certaines organisations policières cherchent désormais à recruter un personnel plus diversifié dans l’optique de renforcer ses liens avec la société. Des études consacrées à la diversité dans ce milieu professionnel ont montré que lorsque la police représentait adéquatement la communauté qu’elle servait, cela contribuait à renforcer la confiance des citoyen·ne·s, mais aussi la légitimité de l’action policière et son efficacité opérationnelle. Certaines barrières à cette diversification subsistent toutefois : elles se situent au niveau du recrutement, de la sélection et de la fidélisation du personnel policier. Dans l’optique de promouvoir une meilleure gestion de la diversité, cet article recommande que les organisations policières modifient leurs stratégies de recrutement afin d’encourager les postulations de femmes et de personnes issues de la migration, ainsi que les postulations de policiers·ières ayant des compétences linguistiques supplémentaires. De plus, il est recommandé de proposer des cours aux candidat·e·s prometteurs·eures présentant certaines lacunes dans la langue de travail principale, mais pouvant apporter en échange d’autres compétences linguistiques. Il s’agit également de s’assurer que l’équipement policiers adoptent des outils de travail flexibles et que les policiers·ières reçoivent des formations qualifiantes adaptées à leur rôle. Finalement, il est essentiel de mettre en œuvre une politique ne tolérant aucune forme de harcèlement sexuel ou de discrimination et de veiller à asseoir une culture policière inclusive et garante de la diversité.
Promuovere la diversità nel lavoro di polizia: sfide e opportunità

L'articolo presentato tratta della diversità degli effettivi all'interno delle organizzazioni di polizia a livello europeo. Storicamente, la polizia è sempre stata considerata come costituita da uomini bianchi, di orientamento politico conservatore ed eterosessuali – una percezione che di fatto ha frenato donne e appartenenti a minoranze etniche dall'idea di una carriera nelle forze dell'ordine. Sulla scia dell'attuazione di legislazioni volte alla promozione delle pari opportunità e di aperture verso il multiculturalismo, alcune organizzazioni di polizia hanno iniziato a reclutare un personale più diversificato al fine di migliorare le relazioni con la comunità. Studi sulla diversità nella polizia hanno infatti dimostrato che quando gli agenti sono rappresentativi delle comunità in cui prestano servizio, la fiducia dei cittadini aumenta, così come la legittimazione dell'operato di polizia e la sua efficacia. La diversità incontra tuttavia delle barriere, in particolare a livello di reclutamento, selezione e fidelizzazione del personale di polizia. Per una gestione della diversità efficace, questo articolo consiglia alle organizzazioni di polizia di modificare le strategie di reclutamento al fine di incoraggiare le candidature di donne e persone con un background migratorio e di pubblicare dati sulla diversità al fine di facilitare il monitoraggio. Inoltre, è opportuno offrire corsi di lingua a candidati promettenti che mostrano lacune minori nella lingua di lavoro ma che, in compenso, apportano altre competenze linguistiche. Occorre inoltre assicurarsi che l'attrezzatura di lavoro, come le armi da fuoco, siano di dimensioni adatte al personale femminile, proporre formazioni su misura per le donne e orari di lavoro flessibili. Infine, è fondamentale attuare una politica della tolleranza zero nei confronti di molestie sessuali e di altre forme di discriminazione, oltre a instaurare una cultura di polizia inclusiva e garante della diversità.