



# Kent Academic Repository

**Silvestri, Marisa and Tong, Stephen (2020) *Women police leaders in Europe: A tale of prejudice and patronage*. European Journal of Criminology . ISSN 1477-3708.**

## Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/82142/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

## The version of record is available from

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370820931867>

## This document version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

## DOI for this version

## Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

## Additional information

## Versions of research works

### Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

### Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal* , Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

## Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact [ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk). Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

# Women police leaders in Europe: A tale of prejudice and patronage

## Introduction

As police organisations across the world face new internal and external challenges, the police leader has assumed an increasingly prominent place in both academic and policy discourses (Davis and Silvestri, 2020; Ramshaw et al, 2019; College of Policing, 2015). Tasked with the responsibility of responding to and navigating complex and challenging environments there is growing concern and criticism over the composition and quality of police leadership. With a preponderance of men in policing, police leaders across the world remain a largely homogenous group. Indeed, the gendered nature of policing remains perhaps one of the most striking truisms about policing systems across jurisdictions. In a rare international comparison of the position of women in policing, Van Ewijk (2011) points to a shared global narrative of opposition and resistance to their recruitment, entry and progression. Research also confirms an enduring “heterosexist male” police culture in the 21st century in which women police continue to experience discrimination, harassment, prejudice in undertaking their roles (Brown et al, 2019; Loftus, 2009). This is as true for countries where their number has remained persistently low as for those where their percentage has increased over time. In this paper we investigate the experiences of women police leaders in Europe. Drawing on interview data with 24 women police leaders across seven European regions, we provide new data and a unique insight on a relatively invisible population. Despite being the focus of considerable attention and public debate, we know surprisingly little about police leaders. We know less about women in these roles and even less about women police leaders serving in a European context, with research on women police dominated by scholarship in the UK, US and Australian contexts (Dick et al 2014).

We are aware that understandings of equality and diversity require considerably more complex investigation beyond gender, including attention to race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and class, as well as their combined and interactive effects. For the purpose of this paper, however, we focus on women as an overarching category in order to develop an analysis of gender and police leadership in Europe. We begin

with a methodological note in which we outline the parameters that govern our research, together with consideration of the complexities involved in undertaking research on gender and policing within Europe. We go on to provide insight into the wider policy context of gender equality within Europe and consider the position of women within European police organisations. The final section of the paper documents our findings. Here, we draw on women's experiences of a career in policing and reflect upon their progression through the ranks. The majority of women we interviewed reported examples of gender stereotyping, discrimination, obstruction, prejudice and patronage over the course of their careers. Our starting point is that organisations are guided by both formal and informal rules and whilst we accept the importance of formal systems, it is not our intention to detail the formal promotion criteria across European police organisations. Rather, we aim to shed light on the ways in which subjective and informal criteria of 'acceptability' shape women's experiences of promotion. We argue that informal patronage is a strong basis from which strategic appointments are made within European police systems. Whilst this impacts adversely on the fairness of promotion systems for both women and men, we emphasise that the power of informal patronage is experienced more acutely by women looking to secure promotion to higher ranks.

The paper makes a number of contributions. Through analysis of new empirical data from difficult to access police leaders across Europe, we present accounts of female police leaders reflecting on their experiences of pursuing advancement in policing and identify informal and formal barriers to female advancement in European police organisations. We also identify gaps in data collected to compare and better understand the dynamics and challenges of females pursuing leadership in the police within Europe. The relevance of these findings is key to informing the future selection and development of police leaders in an increasingly complex police landscape.

### Methodological note:

The data that forms the basis of this paper is derived from a broader study on police leaders undertaken by the second author<sup>1</sup>. Caless and Tong (2015) carried out

---

<sup>1</sup> This data is drawn from previous research conducted by Caless and Tong (2015) on police leadership in Europe. Bryn Caless kindly gave permission to the authors to use this data for this article.

extensive empirical research among the strategic elite in European policing from 2012-2014, gaining accounts from 108 strategic police leaders (of whom 24 were women) from seven European regions. The research involved the following research questions:

- 1) How do police officers progress to the most senior roles and what are their views of the processes involved?
- 2) How are police services held to account in practice?
- 3) How effectively do police services cooperate with one another and what are the challenges to more effective cooperation?
- 4) What are the current levels preoccupations with crime and criminality at the strategic level in policing?
- 5) What the challenges for the future of policing from the perspective of strategic police leaders?

The research was aimed at exploring the views of police leaders in a European context. With this mind, the research was not explicitly designed to uncover views of gendered differences in the workplace, rather, it was an open exploration of the views of strategic leaders more generally. It is within this context that accounts from both men and women provided explicit examples of negative behaviours towards female officers and descriptions of structures that allowed for subjective decision-making with little scrutiny.

Given the financial demands of such a study, data was collected using a mix of face to face interviews and questionnaires. The sample was selected through a 'snowballing' technique of using established policing networks, recommendations from research participants and direct approaches to officers known to have strategic roles. Of the 49 interviews carried out, 7 were with women; of the 59 questionnaires returned, 17 were from women. Accounts from female officers from 15 different countries across all the regions in the research were secured. Governed by confidentiality and anonymity, we present accounts from officers on a regional basis but do not provide details of rank. Participants are identified through general geographic region and random interview number. The regions and total numbers of interviewees from those regions were as follows: Alpine (A, 18), Baltic (Ba, 5),

Benelux (Be, 11), British Isles (BI, 10), Central Europe (C, 22), Mediterranean (M, 22) and Nordic (N, 20)<sup>2</sup>.

The usual caveats that accompany the difficulties in undertaking comparative work also apply to our analysis. The first is that ranks do not transfer between different countries easily making comparative analysis between countries difficult. Rank terms vary considerable across European police forces, and translations of them into English do not always give an adequate meaning or a correct cultural resonance. For example, Caless and Tong (2015: 18) point to the complications using the rank of commissioner. This title can refer to a low junior management rank in Poland or a command rank in Belgium or France. Participants were self-selecting in that respondents were asked whether their roles involved strategic police responsibilities. Inevitably officers involved in this study were in senior management positions equivalent to the ranks of Chief Inspector/Superintendent and higher in a UK context.

Other problems encountered in this comparative analysis is in relation to the diverse structure, culture and approach of police bodies in different jurisdictions. Inevitably, these characteristics are influenced by social, political and economic histories, as well as through the different relationships between the police and the state (Mawby, 1999). In this respect the existing evidence base is not only challenging but is difficult to build and use for comparison. The aim is to investigate what common insights can be drawn from women police leaders in different jurisdictions. Finally, we acknowledge that the original research remit was not specifically aimed at female officers but was concerned with capturing the private thoughts of strategic police leaders in general in relation to the following areas: the processes of progression and promotion within the organisation; accountability of police services; cooperation between police organisations; contemporary crime concerns; and, challenges for the future of policing. A keen interest to explore what sort of people make the key decisions at the top of

---

<sup>2</sup> The research was not restricted to the EU but included non-members such as Switzerland and Norway because they are integral parts of any European policing 'system'. Standard regional groupings have been based on socio-economic and geographic associations: **Alpine**: Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Slovenia Germany; **Baltic**: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; **Benelux**: Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg; **British Isles**: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, and the Republic of Ireland; **Central Europe**: Czech Republic, Poland, Romanian, Slovakia & Hungary; **Mediterranean**: Portugal, Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Malta and the British territory of Gibraltar; **Nordic**: Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark & Iceland.

policing together with an appreciation of the processes of their advancement, inevitably led us to a discussion of the importance of gender. Despite a focus on women's narratives in this paper, we incorporate men's views where appropriate to the discussion.

## **Gender Equality and Policing in Europe**

Dealt with on a national, European and international level, the development of gender and anti-discrimination policy is multifaceted. In her work on comparative gender and policy in Europe, Mazur (2009) emphasises the complex and differential meanings of gender equality across different jurisdictions. In relation to mapping the progress of gender equality within Europe, again, sources invariably use their own definition and carry limitations, making it difficult to make comparisons across countries. One thing we can be sure of is that the equalities architecture across the European Union (EU) has grown exponentially over the past decade and there has been a concerted effort to advance equality through the mainstreaming of gender equality principles into all EU policies and programmes. The recent *European Commission's Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019* sets the framework for improving equality between women and men, with a focus on key priorities, including: increasing women's economic independence; reducing the gender gaps in pay and pensions; addressing poverty among women; and promoting equality between women and men in decision-making. We concern ourselves with the latter and whilst decision making in this context refers predominantly to women in political decision-making careers, such decision-making has much resonance with those in police leadership roles. Despite the difficulties in using cross-country data sets, there is a strong consensus that women remain woefully under-represented in political decision making at local, national and European levels. The Gender Equality Index developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), shows that although 'power' is the area where most progress has been made in the past 10 years, it is also the area where the gender gap remains widest. Men continue to dominate in every EU Member State's national parliament. With a score of 100 equalling gender balance, Sweden is currently the only EU country to score over 90 on the 'political power' indicator, which is based on the share of women ministers, members of parliament and women in regional assemblies. Figures from the European Parliamentary Research Service (2019) indicate that when it comes to the members of national governments of Member

States, Spain, Sweden and France lead the way in upholding the standards of equality, with 52.4 %, 52.2 % and 48.6 % of women respectively. Hungary and Malta are trailing with a mere 7.1 % and 12 % of women each. Cyprus and Italy also have very low numbers of women in government, 16.7 %, followed closely by Poland with 17 %. Interestingly, despite the persistent under-representation of women in decision-making in politics, findings from the *Special Eurobarometer Survey on Gender Equality (2017)* suggest that 84% of respondents (including 80% of men) consider gender equality important to them personally and support a fairer distribution of power with 70 % of Europeans in favour of legal measures to ensure parity between women and men in politics and 86 % think that they can be represented by female politicians.

A global review of women's representation in policing also demonstrates their under-representation within the police workforce, particularly at senior levels. The percentage of women in policing in the United States has remained relatively stagnant for the past twenty years, comprising less than 13% of total officers and a much smaller proportion in leadership positions (Schuck, 2019). In Canada, women comprise 21% of sworn officers in 2017 (Conor, 2017). In New Zealand, women made up almost 33% of police recruits in 2016, with 14 % serving in chief officer roles of superintendent and above. In Australia, 33.2% of police staff (sworn and unsworn) in 2016-2017 were women (Australia ROGS, 2018).

Across Europe, there is considerable divergence in the representation of women in policing. Whilst some countries have gone beyond 25% - Estonia, Latvia, Ireland, Germany, Spain, and England and Wales. Several nation-states have reported percentages of officers being at or below 15%, including Belgium, Finland, France, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, Greece, Austria, Denmark and Luxembourg (Prenzler and Sinclair, 2013). All in all, there is a lack of evidence of a fully integrated police organisation anywhere in Europe, where women represent 50% of the officer workforce and enjoy an equivalent share of the full range of roles and ranks within the police hierarchy (Van Ewijk, 2011). Diversity remains low in general and diminishes as police officers' rank increases. Research on Estonia for example, indicates that whilst women constitute 38% of police officers, only 12% serve at higher rank (Van Ewijk, 2011). In 2012, Europol launched its own gender-balance project to explore the lack of women in leadership positions. With women accounting for 35% of Europol staff,

only 0.5% of those are in middle or senior management, although it is noteworthy that Catherine De Bolle has recently been made Director of Europol (2018). A further report by SEESAC (2015) indicates that only a few women occupy senior level positions in police services in South East Europe. With only a few women occupying most of the uniformed and commissioned women held lower level positions (SEESAC, 2015). There are however some outliers here with some jurisdictions in Europe indicating a more balanced landscape. Currently forming 30% of the overall police workforce and 27% of chief officers, women police serving in England and Wales have been hailed a success story. As is the case in France where Pruvost (2009) documents the high number of women serving in the leadership rank of *Commissaire*; indeed there are more women at the top of the hierarchy than in the lower ranks of the French Police, but this is deliberate policy with women being recruited directly to command rank. With a strong reputation for gender equality, the Swedish police service has also done much to attract women into policing and into leadership positions through appointing them as non-sworn employees - about 40% of all employees in the Swedish Police are women and among police officers specifically, they form 25%. The number of female leaders has also increased this past decade and in 2010 approximately 22% of police officers are women who are leaders at different levels (The National Police Board, 2008 cited in Osterlind & Haake, 2010).

In short, the reality suggests that in most developed democracies, the percentage of sworn women police remains below 25% and for the most part, appears to have reached a plateau. For women in non-democratic or emerging democracies, they remain grossly under-represented (Natarajan, 2008; Strobl, 2019). The lack of consistent data within Europe is a limitation of our commentary. In presenting our analysis, we are therefore mindful of the homogenising effect of our discussions about policewomen in Europe, especially given the inconsistencies and skewed nature of women's representation across different countries. In what follows, we report on two broad themes of prejudice and patronage that emerged as common experiences in women's accounts of their police careers.

## Gendered Stereotypes and Prejudice

The characterisation of women as unsuitable for the job of policing and for a role in police leadership remains a persistent theme within the literature. In 1997, Brown



argued that policewomen across all European jurisdictions believed that they had been discriminated against in terms of deployment, promotion prospects and training. Some twenty years later the findings we report echo this. Women in our study report both blatant and subtle forms of discrimination in their experience of climbing the ranks. The majority of the women we interviewed were critically outspoken of the chauvinism, prejudice and discrimination encountered from their male colleagues. Most were able to recall their experiences with absolute clarity from the start of their careers and throughout their progression in the ranks. One respondent from the Mediterranean region commented that the stereotyping of the female officer was inherent in the system noting that:

It is typical of the arrogant chauvinism which characterises the police as an occupation and which, as a woman and a feminist, I have had to fight against from the day I joined. [Interviewee M37]

Traditional and pejorative stereotypical attitudes about women were echoed by another woman from the same region:

The majority of my peers are against women [...] and one of them said to me that I should be “in the kitchen, pregnant”. Yes, like this. I asked him “Where do you keep your brain? In your arse?” He was angry but his attitude is so stupid and old fashioned. [Interviewee M14]

The following strategic police leaders from the Central Europe Region recall the often explicit and personal judgements made on their physical appearance:

I have had difficulties with my peers. All at this level are male and I am female, so at all points there is male dominance and that can make relationships very uncomfortable. Some, though not all, of my colleagues seem to feel threatened by me and I have to suffer comments about how I look and how I smell. They do not say those things to each other. I could say (but I do not) that they look like lumps in their uniforms and they smell pretty bad. [Interviewee C87]

It makes me angry that [male police officers] think like the newspapers and journals with some sort of God-given right to talk about how I look, not about what I do. This would not be the case with a male chief: they would not discuss his hair, his nails, make-up and weight! [Interviewee C6]

In our study, women conceived of themselves as threats to the status quo. A characteristic comment from a female police leader in Central Europe:

I am surrounded by male values and male colleagues, which can be hard as a woman because you are expected to play by the rules of their game and not by any of your own rules. I do not have support from my peers and I would not expect any. They see me as a threat. In fact, I am glad to be a threat because this may open the way for other women to follow me who may do better than I have managed. [Interviewee C71]

Another from the Baltic Region noted that whilst some of her male colleagues were supportive, there was nonetheless a visceral opposition to her appointment:

My relationship with my peers is mixed. Some are still deeply chauvinistic and regard my presence in the carpeted corridors with horror and concern, but others are strong supports and are delighted that a woman has broken through the 'blue ceiling'. [Interviewee Ba76]

Even in the Nordic region and in the British Isles famed for their gender equality, female police leaders register a struggle to be seen as equal to their male colleagues. Whilst these women may no longer face or experience the visible and audible hostility of their European counterparts, they do continue to experience the processes of gendered inclusion and exclusion, albeit in more subtle ways, as indicated by the following:

As a woman, it is always more difficult to prove that you can do a job in a world dominated by men's rules, like policing is. [Interviewee N68]

I had a picture of myself being "the leader of a group" long before I became a police officer. In the police organisation I later found out that women were not chiefs, so it became for me a struggle for years before finding the path to the top. I knew that I wanted to stake a claim in the system and I looked for the educational qualifications that would give me the knowledge and skills.. attaining this proof of my ability. [Interviewee N45]

Data reported by Caless on a female chief from the British Isles (2011:45) further emphasises the position:

They might give you [strategic police leadership] of some smaller force, but nothing substantial ... I'm horrified frankly that such attitudes are not more robustly challenged.... [T]he irony is that it is in the top jobs that this happens, not in the lower ranks.

This final observation from the British Isles was recorded before the promotion of women to arguably the most senior police roles in the UK. Since data collection, a number of significant gains for women in strategic police roles can be observed, including the appointment of Sarah Thornton (until recently Chair of the National Police Chief Council), Cressida Dick (London Metropolitan Police Commissioner) and Lynne Owens (Director of the National Crime Agency). Although this does create more visibility for female police leaders and may contribute to positive changes for women in the police, this does not necessarily change the broader picture of stagnation in the recruitment and mobility of women in the police.

The high visibility of women in policing is accompanied by an increased expectation of failure as observed by the following woman in the Central Europe Region:

I wish to say that there are not enough women in my police service. About 10%. It is so very hard to come to the top in such a system, weighted for men not for women. Many seemed to think when I was appointed, that in a very few moments I would fail, and they watch hungrily for this to happen. But it does not. I go on and I succeed and I even get promoted. Such people now look a little bit sick because I was not a disaster like they said. [Interviewee C91]

For many, the struggle and resistance has become an accepted and routinised feature of a police career and is described as one that women need to learn to live with if they seek promotion to leadership:

My mother told me I was a fool to enter policing and she may have been right. It has been the hell of a struggle to succeed and climb up. [Interviewee C94]

I tell all the females who aspire to high office that they have to put up with personal attacks, anti-female attitudes, expectations of failure or weakness and patronising comments all the time. They will have to learn to ride with them, but if you want to get to the top, this is the price [you pay] for it. [Interviewee C86; our interpolation in square brackets]

Perceptions of resistance within our study are firmly located within the police service itself and not in the broader criminal justice system or beyond, with some respondents, like this Nordic Region leader, forcefully noting the stubborn 'masculine ethos' within the function of policing:

Having begun the steep climb in the police, I was as determined to become a chief police officer as friends of mine were to be judges or ministers or TV executives. Some places are easier to succeed in, like universities which practise equality. Others, like the police and military are much harder to break open. So, I feel good that I have done this. [Interviewee N52]

A respondent from Central Europe specifically draws attention to the prominence of experiential factors over intellectual ones as being characteristic of policing values and a root cause of gendered prejudice:

In the larger CJS world, I do not meet this kind of [gender] prejudice. There are some female judges and plenty of clever female lawyers, and I get on very well with most of them, and with the male lawyers...Several of the lawyers tell me that they cannot believe that the police is still so old-fashioned but they forget that the law makes you an intellectual equal because of your brain. In policing in my country, what makes you equal is being a practitioner and being clever comes a long way second. [Interviewee C72]

Women working in policing have long been aligned with undertaking stereotypical roles associated with the domestic sphere. If we adopt a historical lens, early policewomen's presence in policing was only enabled through a focus on social and welfare work tasks, working with female suspects, victims of crime and young people (Brown & Heidensohn, 2000). Over a century later, our data suggest that such an association remains. The notion that policewomen should deal only with 'morality' crimes is remarkably persistent, as encountered by a prominent strategic police leader from the Mediterranean Region:

I could not believe when this politician asked me if I did women's crimes. "What are those?" I asked and he said "Oh, you know, kids and sex crime, that sort". I told him very strongly that I was a police leader and that meant [I dealt with] all crime and that he really ought to try visiting the twenty-first century from time to time, because the world I live in seems very different from his. [Interviewee M14; our interpolation in square brackets]

The following officers from the Central Europe and Mediterranean Regions encountered the same kind of embedded cultural hostility to the proposition that women can become effective police leaders:

I wanted to be a chief officer from very early on in my career, but policing is a very male world and as long as I did "women's policing" (sex offence investigation, missing children, liaison, community) everyone was OK and I was

commended and promoted. But, as soon as I tried to go into the Detective Branch [in a senior role], there were objections. [Interviewee C6]

Of course, everywhere there was prejudice against women and for a long time I was given only 'morality' crimes involving prostitutes or domestic violence or children. But I am very determined and so slowly I rose until now I do have strategic command. [Interviewee M56]

Such views are perhaps not so surprising when we consider findings from the *Special Eurobarometer Survey (2017)* that evidences the persistent and stubborn nature of the public's gendered expectations of the domestic sphere. Compared to ten years ago, the report documents the regressive nature of gender equality with 12 countries having moved backwards when it comes to the gender balance in terms of time spent on care, domestic work and social activities. Clear gendered expectations in the domestic sphere are prevalent with housekeeping and raising children still largely considered a woman's role. More than four in ten Europeans (44 %) believe the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family. Moreover, in one third of EU Member States this percentage is even 70 % or more.

The power of such stereotypes is inextricably linked to debates about the 'ideal' worker within organisations. Silvestri (2018) argues that gendered ideas about what makes an 'ideal' police officer and an 'ideal' police leader underpin organisational and individual belief systems - in both cases, the 'ideal' is male. Such findings are echoed in Barth-Farkas and Vera's (2018: 56) study of prototypicality, power and gender in the German police. Drawing on data with 106 male and 34 female officers, their study offers interesting insights into belief systems of the 'ideal' leader. Described as cooperative, dominant, honest, strong, and conscientious, the prototypical leader lies in direct contrast to descriptions of the non-prototypical police leader, perceived as sensitive, creative, arrogant, charismatic, and critical. Barth-Farkas and Vera emphasise that respondents, both female and male, described prototypical leaders as male and dominant and were equally trusting in their endorsement of the male prototypical leader. Where they differ, however, is that whilst female officers accept both prototypical and non-prototypical leaders (i.e. both men and women in leadership roles) the same is not true for male officers, who overwhelmingly accepted only the male prototypical. With men securing their positions as 'ideal' leaders, it follows

through that women in or aspiring to leadership positions are viewed as atypical leaders – again, reconfirming the idea of women as ‘outsiders’ in policing. The experiences of women reported in this paper suggest the tenacity and intransigent nature of stereotypes associated with women.

## The Power of Patronage

Promotion and selection procedures for police officers varies considerably across Europe and we remind readers of the lack of data sources and academic research from which to develop our analysis. Findings from the broader study on police leaders in Europe conducted by Caless and Tong (2015) indicated that selection systems across European police jurisdictions appear haphazard and subjectively selective. They note a number of problems ranging from; a lack of consensus on leadership qualities, exclusion or gender biased processes, a lack of consistent systematic objective processes and ‘cloning’ - i.e. developing people in the mirror image of those in charge. The diversity of requirements ranged from political appointments, qualification requirements, length of time served through to nomination by senior officers. The informal yet complex operation of patronage was present for both women and men aspiring to police leadership roles within Europe. Patronage here refers to a range of support from those in powerful positions that can be a form of sponsorship or more. Drawing on the wider study, police leaders emphasised the subjective and discretionary process of patronage in the recruitment process, with 50% of the sample identifying ‘talent spotting’ or ‘grooming’ of individuals by senior officers as part of the recruitment selection process for police leaders. The overall recruitment process was not viewed particularly positively with 51.8% of the overall sample (n=108) and 79.16% of women in the sample (24) describing the shortcomings and unfairness in the recruitment process for strategic police leaders. The following male respondents sum up the sentiment when they note that:

You need a patron or sponsor to help you by mentoring, by encouraging you to develop your profile by getting the right sorts of jobs to bring you to notice. Networking is very important, because if you impress the right people with your skills or your determination, then they will ask for you for a task and then help you to rise if you are successful. That is the point: if you fail, you will have no backers or support. This game is all about winning. [Mediterranean region, male participant 16]

The lack of an open system is the problem, so people can manipulate the process to suit themselves and it is not a secret that some leaders select and groom their successors for many years. The network which picks out and develops police chiefs needs to be tighter, more structured, less loose, and above everything we must focus on making sure we have people who have a strategic command capability. (Interviewee, Ba5, male).

Selection can be a bit hit or miss, depending on whether the presiding powers have decided whether you are good or bad, and therefore whether you are worth investing in. Some of my colleagues were not promoted for a long time because they had got on the wrong side of someone who was powerful or whose views were well-regarded, and I guess you never really know what goes on behind the closed doors when people's aptitudes are being discussed'. (Interviewee, A1, male).

The promotion process is still not transparent, as there are sideways routes involving some sort of favouritism or nepotism: you need to know someone who knows someone, or be seen to walk the corridor at the time when the person whose patronage you need is at work. Too many chief police officers look for their mirror image when choosing their successor. (interviewee, N41, male)

Described by Caless (2011: 78) as 'the (subjective) capability to identify potential and advance it by granting opportunities and giving recognition for achievement', we argue that the power of patronage although experienced by both men and women, is felt most acutely by women looking to progress to leadership positions. Given the predominance of men in senior police roles and in the context of such subjective recruitment methods, we argue that men are better able to assume the position of both gatekeeper to and beneficiary of leadership roles.

The senior woman below points to the fundamental problems when considering the lack of advancement in the face of satisfying the official criteria:

It is unfair: I did all the required courses but was still not selected ... I had more experience and qualifications than many of the men who were put forward above me. There is protection of poor male officers by the system and the ceiling is very strong, hard to break open ... I know that I can do most chief jobs given the chance, but the system is loaded against women. (Central Europe, Female Participant C6).

Another, from the same Region, thought that her rise in another profession would have been both more rapid and less obstructed, with equality in policing still dependent on the support of individuals:

If I had become a professor in one of our universities, I would have risen more quickly and more easily, I think. But I have a great satisfaction that I have become a strategic police leader against all the disapproval. There were people above me who tried the experiment of promoting me – some very new to policing themselves – and I am grateful to them for their faith. But it should not have to be that you rely on a few visionaries to see what you can do and take [a] chance [on] you. The majority still think women should be home with babies, I say you need to get real. [Interviewee C91; our interpolations in square brackets]

Of concern is that such subjective selection processes are not necessarily seen as problematic among some strategic leaders, as this male officer reveals:

‘There is no formal selection process system: you are picked to become a [strategic police leader] on the recommendation of two senior and serving police leaders so as to avoid any suggestions of bias or favouritism’ (Interviewee, A7, male)

Recommendations of two senior police officers in selecting officers for promotion is not indicative of a thorough or fair selection process, as emphasised by the following female officer serving in a different region:

‘Despite all the new Constitution and progress in other public professions, policing remains heavily male-dominated. They make the rules and it is hard for a woman to break through and compete on level terms. To make top rank, you have to have two recommendations from seniors above you; I have had to wait much longer than men for my promotions and that is why. So I think it is an unfair system, biased against women to succeed and we must change this.’ (Interviewee, C72, female).

The dangers of informal patronage through familiarity exerts a powerful influence over who gets appointed or promoted and as such disadvantages ‘outsiders’ to the dominant group who diverge from the stereotypical leadership ideal. The importance of such informal support and networks of patronage for women seeking leadership positions has been well documented by a range of commentators in other working spheres beyond policing. Schoen et al (2018) point to the considerable benefits of individual informal networks for women working in academia in supporting overall career progression, particularly with regard to the speed of promotion. Van Der Brink (2009) describes the presence of networks of male gatekeepers responsible for



scouting candidates for professorial appointments. Not only are women overlooked in the scouting process, but male gatekeepers prefer men because the image of the academic professor is inextricably intertwined with men and masculinity, thereby hindering women's access to senior academic positions. Holgersson's (2013: 464) analysis on male managers in Sweden draws on the concept of homosociality to make sense of the ways in which informal aspects of career progression function alongside formal promotion criteria to preserve men as the 'ideal' candidates for leadership positions. The concept of homosociality has been used to understand power as gendered and to describe men's preference for other men and the exclusion of women. She goes on to suggest that despite men's wish to see more women in leadership positions and an awareness of the adverse career conditions faced by women, only a few of the male managers she interviewed reflected upon their own preference for other men. In turn, she suggests that homosociality is often an 'unreflexive practice embedded in organizational structures and cultures, enabling men to simultaneously reproduce male dominance in management while portraying themselves as pro-equality'. Reflecting on the dynamics of gendering practices at work, Yancey Martin (2003: 344) also argues that many gendering practices are done unreflexively, they 'happen fast, are "in action," and occur on many levels'.

In their analysis of how candidates are selected for political appointments, Bjarnegård and Kenny (2016) also emphasise the informal aspects of the selection process and their gendered consequences. Here they point to the ways in which both formal and informal party rules and practices are shaped and structured by gender norms – favouring the model of the 'ideal candidate', who is usually a man. Their comparative research on Scotland and Thailand draws on the concept of 'clientelism' to explain the dominance of men in the Scottish Labour Party and the Thai Rak party. Whilst these are different political parties operating in different geographical contexts, analysis of the gendered aspects of their candidate selection processes suggests that they are also marked by some striking similarities. In both instances, successful candidates are characterised by the building and maintenance of close-knit personal informal networks. As Bjarnegård and Kenny (2016: 380) note: 'knowing the right local people and being part of the right local networks is crucial for social acceptance and for being considered a suitable candidate'. Given that clientelist networks are almost entirely

male-dominated, they argue that 'informal and masculinist party practices of local patronage, clientelism and homosociality are maintained' (ibid: 387).

It seems that aspiring police leaders need to negotiate an increasingly competitive environment and consider gaining advantages through comprehensive networks, effective and helpful sponsors and negotiate formal selection processes. Caless and Tong (2015) summarise the role of patronage for strategic police leaders in Europe when they note that 'patronage still plays a prominent part in the selection and appointment of strategic police leaders, and there is strong emerging evidence from interviewees' testimony that the selection system across Europe continues to rely on such leaders being spotted early and nurtured by existing chiefs'. This is not to suggest that formal rules are not important for making sense of the selection of candidates, they are. Silvestri's (2018) work on the formal aspects of the police career model in the England and Wales has done much to expose its discriminatory impacts. She argues that the strictly linear career model, with its single-entry point and ideology of internal recruitment, has functioned over the past century to inscribe and maintain the 'heroic male' as the 'ideal' police leader. Moreover, she argues that the recent introduction of direct entry for senior ranks should be viewed as a 'disruptive' tool to the gendered order in policing and one that may impact positively on the number of women working in leadership. Brown et al (2014) have also argued that female police officers are more likely to access higher ranks from outside than by moving up internally from the lower ranks. Opening up alternative routes to police leadership have proved successful in some European jurisdictions – Sweden, France and the Netherlands are good examples. While the experience of women leaders appointed in such ways is yet to be fully explored, we do know that police organisations throughout the world pay much credence to being an 'insider'. In turn, 'outsiders' find it difficult to command the respect and authority needed in such leadership roles (Osterlind & Haake, 2010; Van der Lippe et al, 2004). Perhaps not surprisingly, women appointed under such circumstances risk being perceived through 'a discourse of tokenism'.

## Conclusion:

Varying from country to country, different structures and approaches to policing, through to a variation in formal to informal rules, all serve to impact differentially on

the ways in which gender equality is managed, supported or hindered in policing. Gender equality is not however solely about police structures and processes but also has much to do with the cultural characteristics of police organizations and the societies they serve. This inevitably results in a kaleidoscope of evolving police services with internal and external influences, some of which the police have limited control over, presenting significant challenges to consistency in Europe. This can result in change at a different pace from progression, through to stagnation and in some cases, regression. In a European context, in an increasingly globalized and connected context, police cooperation is based on bilateral and multinational arrangements and supranational organizations. The impact of these connections between nations and police services serves as potential for the future but not without clear strategic aims, a commitment to monitor progress and commitment to long term change it is unclear where meaningful change can occur. Informal or formal structures of resistance vary in impact and inevitably link to structures and influences beyond policing.

Speculations about the possible future of women in policing across the globe remain mixed and there are worrying signs of a 'plateau' effect in relation to women's progression in policing (Cordner and Cordner, 2011; Prenzler et al, 2010; Prenzler and Sinclair 2013). In her review of the stagnation of women in policing in the US, Schuck (2019: 42) calls for the development of metrics and accountability systems, arguing that 'Police executives need to develop metrics for evaluating organizational progress regarding increasing the representation of women across all units within the organization as well as the equality of work attainment between female and male officers. Objectives must be defined, theories of cause and effect developed, specific activities identified, data evaluated, and learning feedback loops created'. We concur with the call for greater formal accounting systems. Our first call is for a systemic collection of baseline data, with attention to women's position within the police hierarchy throughout Europe. Although a focus on the numeric is not necessarily an indicator of success, it is at least a starting point for those wishing to push for greater gender equality. Schuck (2019: 42) sums this up neatly when she argues that describing the underrepresentation of women in policing as a problem provides a convincing case that 'disparities in representation and decision making have consequences for policing organizations as well as the communities that they serve'.

Such data also affords an opportunity to reflect upon possible change over time and will enable a greater analysis of the correlation with wider equality indicators in place, such as the political power indicator noted above.

We also call for in-depth quantitative and qualitative empirical research across European jurisdictions to ascertain both the formal and informal dimensions of the candidate selection processes. We anticipate that such investigation will allow us to better understand why some countries are more successful with recruiting, promoting and retaining women. While those aspiring to leadership positions may seek to demonstrate skills, knowledge, values and abilities, it is also the context in which selection takes place and the behaviours that are tolerated or flourish and the networks in place that frame the environment in which future leaders are presented and selected and allowed to succeed. Putting gender considerations aside there is inconsistency in approaches to appointment and development of leaders in Europe. The value placed on characteristics such as education, experience and political regimes is different with little agreement about what makes a good leader. Investigating the institutional dimensions of the opportunity structures within police organisations is essential in order to explain women's minority status in policing as well as the persistence of male dominance. We therefore urge those with a remit for increasing diversity within their organisations to undertake a systematic analysis of the key points in their career processes, such as recruitment, selection, promotion boards, recognition systems, rewards structures, assessment tools for potential, and development programmes, to assess whether there are obstacles here to women performing on an equal basis with men. At the same time, we encourage further investigation into the more subjective and informal aspects of selection processes. We have argued that patronage networks tend to uphold traditional power relations and work against women pursuing leadership positions, reproducing homosocial relations.

Given the prevalence of stereotyping and prejudice experienced by women in our findings, we further urge a greater focus on exploring men's views on gender equality. Much of the research on gender and policing has identified the difficulties in combining work and family responsibilities and the reticence of women to put themselves forward for promotion. And whilst these are both valid realities, the focus and onus of

responsibility to rise through the police hierarchy lies with individual women and with organisations in an abstract sense. Here, organisations are tasked with providing flexible working patterns to enable women to participate more fully, and in turn women are individually responsabilised to better manage home and work commitments. They are also tasked with developing their own confidence in seeking out promotion opportunities. The failure however to identify men's prejudice and use of stereotypes of women as key aspects to explain the lack of women in police leadership is a glaring omission. The extent to which such gendering practices are enacted with intent and awareness by men has been the subject of considerable debate. Indeed, the growing interest in identifying and tackling 'unconscious bias' within organisations has been hailed as a panacea for confronting discriminatory practices. Holgersson (2013:463) argues that men's own lack of awareness of their own homosocial practices may indeed go some way toward explaining why diversity initiatives have thus far had limited success, noting that 'It is not necessarily men's negative perceptions of women *per se* that lead them to primarily recruit men, but rather their preference for certain men and the complex web of homosocial relations surrounding management careers that direct their attention to other men.....the exclusion of women is a latent function of homosocial processes among men'. Yancey Martin (2003: 355; 357) refers to the concept of 'liminal awareness' to represent men's mobilization of masculinities without being conscious of doing so. Through a lack of reflexivity, men are able to mobilize and practice masculinities without being fully conscious of doing so. As a result, she argues, the harm experienced by women through such practices is rendered invisible, leaving men to 'honestly deny' that they are acting in a gendered way. We concur with Yancey Martin (2003) who argues that practising gender in organisations is informed by both liminal awareness and non-reflexivity as well as intentionally and reflexively. As a result, gendered stereotyping, prejudice and practices of informal patronage within policing and standards will not change without active resistance and challenge by both women and men.

In conjunction with the police focussed research noted above, we encourage a more comprehensive examination of the external environment that affect women's employment patterns. European countries are considerably different in terms of political, cultural, and social contexts and such variables affect women's ability to enjoy full political and civil rights, which in turn affects women's employment patterns (Orloff,

1993). Women's positions in organisational life is inseparable from their position in wider society. The cultural construction of the role of women more broadly, together with an appreciation of the gendered differences in wider social provisions, such as those that deal with the balance of home and work, are substantially different across space and time, are likely to influence women's employment patterns in policing (Schulz, 2019; Strobl 2019; Chu, 2013)

This is an ambitious programme of works and one that will take some time to gather support and momentum to administer. To better facilitate this, we encourage women working in policing across Europe to come together and join forces in advancing their status. Accounts of early policing suggest that women involved in the work of policing were interested in each other nationally as well as on a more global level. Indeed, some of the most wide-ranging and oldest collaborations in policing can be found in a range of networks promoting women's status. Founded in 1915, the International Association of Women Police (IAWP) retains a strong contemporary presence acting as a world-wide forum and network of support and training for both women and men. At a European level, the development of the European Network of Policewomen (ENP) in 1989 has acted as an important hub for knowledge and information exchange, encouraging the formation of national networks for policewomen. Establishing such coalitions and alliances in the pursuit of equality initiatives are important for the stimulation of debate and activism; they also offer an important forum within which individuals can realise their shared experiences. We support these approaches as essential in improving women's status in policing across Europe.

In mitigating against the presence of patronage, we encourage a more formalised system of sponsorship for women police. Whilst the positive power of mentoring is a well-established feature of supporting women to progress within organisations, sponsorship is a more systematic attempt to connect women with significant individuals as well as a formal attempt to plug them into the power structures inherent in organisational life. Through the development of strong relationships with specific individuals, Schuck (2019) emphasises the advocacy that can take place as an outcome, including the: offering of recommendations and information, increased visibility, the brokering of connections to leaders inside and outside the organization and the opening up career opportunities.

Gender equality should be observed in practice at all levels of the police yet currently, even in the most apparently socially enlightened of countries, fewer than half the available senior women police make the advance to strategic leadership. It is important to note that the variation in the gender balance across European policing systems has much to do with specific historical, social, economic and political contexts within each jurisdiction. The presence of women and their status may also be an indicator of both the progressiveness of policing in a country and the general state of democracy (Brown et al 2014). Schuck (2018:251) also highlights that synergy between demographics and female representation in the police is important as being consistent with the principles of democratic societies, i.e. as being both symbolic of and as active participants in exercising state sanctioned acts of formal social control “alongside instead of behind men”. Though there is now a wealth of literature that indicates women’s positive impacts on everyday policing, and whilst we make no assumption that increasing the number of women in police leadership will automatically result in ‘improved’ policing, we do, emphasise the importance of recruiting more women in relation to achieving social justice and legitimacy.

In presenting the under-researched accounts of European female police leaders in terms of their experience of stereotyping and prejudice, we have articulated the informal and formal barriers to advancement of women working in the police in Europe. We have also examined the literature and identified gaps in the data required to analyse developments across Europe and have made recommendations to improve gender equality in police agencies in Europe. The ongoing changes to political, economic, social, technological and legal environments will undoubtedly continue to pose considerable opportunities and threats to European police forces over the next decade or so. It matters significantly to policing that leadership selection systems in the EU are disadvantaging women. Issues of equality and diversity impact tangibly on the overall legitimacy of the police service in Europe and elsewhere and matters more in times of crisis when policing legitimacy is consistently called into question and public confidence in the police as a public body is low.

## References:

Australia Report on Government Services (2018). Online at <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2018/justice>.

Bjarnegård E and Kenny M (2016) Comparing Candidate Selection: A Feminist Institutional Approach. *Government and Opposition* 51 (3): 370–392.

Barth-Farkas F and Vera A (2018) Female Leaders in a Male Organisation. *European Law Enforcement Research Bulletin* 17: 51-66.

Brown J (1997) European Policewomen: A Comparative Research Perspective. *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 25 (1): 1–19.

Brown J, Fleming J, Silvestri M, Linton K and Gouseti I (2019) Implications of police occupational culture in discriminatory experiences of senior women in police forces in England and Wales. *Policing and Society*:121-136.

Brown J, Prenzler T and Van Ewijk A (2014) Women in Policing *Encyclopaedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*: 5548- 5560, New York: Springer.

Brown J and Heidensohn, F (2000) *Gender and Policing*. London: Macmillan.

Caless B (2011) *Policing at the Top*. Bristol: Policy Press

Caless B and Tong S (2015) *Leading Policing in Europe: An Empirical Study of Strategic Police Leadership*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Chu D (2013) Gender Integration in Policing: A Comparison of Male and Female Police Officers Perceptions in Taiwan *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 37 (2): 143-157.

College of Policing. (2015). *Leadership review*. College of Policing. Retrieved from [http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Development/Promotion/the-leadership-review/Documents/Leadership\\_Review\\_Final\\_June-2015.pdf](http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Development/Promotion/the-leadership-review/Documents/Leadership_Review_Final_June-2015.pdf)

Conor P (2018) Police Resources in Canada, (2017) Online at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54912-eng.htm>.

Cordner G and Cordner A, (2011) Stuck on a Plateau? Obstacles to recruitment, selection, and retention of women police. *Police Quarterly* 14 (3): 207–226.

Davis C and Silvestri M (2020) *Critical Perspectives on Police Leadership*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Dick P, Silvestri M and Westmarland L (2014) Women Police: Potential and Possibilities for Police Reform. In Brown J (ed) *The Future of Policing* London: Routledge, pp.134-148.



European Parliamentary Research Service (2019) From 2019: Women in politics in the EU  
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635548/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)635548\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635548/EPRS_BRI(2019)635548_EN.pdf)

Holgerson C (2013) Recruiting Managing Directors: Doing Homosexuality *Gender, Work and Organization* 20 (4): 454-466.

Loftus B (2009) *Police Culture in a Changing World* Oxford: Clarendon studies in Criminology.

Mawby R (1999) (ed) *Policing Across the World: Issues for the Twenty-first Century*, London: UCL Press.

Mazur A (2009) Comparative gender and policy projects in Europe: Current trends in theory, method and research. *Comparative European Politics* 7 (1): 12–36.

Natarajan M (2008) *Women Police in a Changing Society*. Aldershot: Ashgate

New Zealand Police (2016) Current Statistics of Women in New Zealand Police. Online at <http://www.police.govt.nz/about-us/75-years-women-police/celebrating-our-current-staff/current-statistics-women-nz-police>.

Orloff A (1993) Gender and the Social Rights of Citizenship: The Comparative Analysis of Gender Relations and Welfare States. *American Sociology Review* 58: 303–28.

Osterlind M and Haake U (2010) The leadership discourse amongst female police leaders in Sweden. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal* 30(16): 1–24.

Prenzler T, Fleming J and King A, (2010) Gender equity in Australian and New Zealand Policing: a five year review. *International Journal of Police Science and Management*. 12: 584–595.

Prenzler T and Sinclair G (2013) The Status of women police officers: An International review. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 41(2): 115-131.

Pruvost G (2009) A Profession in Process: The Atypical Rise of Women to the High Rank of Police 'Commissaire' in France. *Sociologie du Travail*, 51: 34-48.

Rabe-Hemp C and Garcia V.(eds) (2019) *Women Policing Across the Globe: Shared Challenges and Successes in the Integration of Women Police Worldwide*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Schoen C, Rost K and Seidl D (2018) The influence of gender ratios on academic careers: Combining social networks with tokenism. *PLoS ONE* 13(11).

Schuck A (2019) Women Policing in the United States: Post-Gender Institutions? In Rabe-Hemp, C and Garcia,V. (eds) *Women Policing Across the Globe: Shared Challenges and Successes in the Integration of Women Police Worldwide*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, pp. 31-48.

Schuck A (2018) Women in Policing and the Response to Rape: Representative Bureaucracy and Organizational Change. *Feminist Criminology* 13 (3): 237-259.

Schulz C (2019) Pregnancy and Motherhood: Maternity Leave Policies and Policing In Rabe-Hemp, C and Garcia,V. (eds) *Women Policing Across the Globe: Shared Challenges and Successes in the Integration of Women Police Worldwide*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, pp 175-192.

SEESAC (2015) Women in Police Services in South East Europe, available at: <http://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Gender-and-Security/Women-in-Police-Services-in-South-East-Europe-.pdf>

Silvestri M (2018) Disrupting the “Heroic” Male Within Policing: A Case of Direct Entry. *Feminist Criminology* 13(3): 309–328.

Special Eurobarometer 465 (2017), Gender Equality 2017, [EBS 465], available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2154>.

Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/strategic\\_engagement\\_for\\_gender\\_equality\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/strategic_engagement_for_gender_equality_en.pdf)

Strobl S (2019) Women and Policing in Kuwait: Deferring Gender Inclusion In Rabe-Hemp C and Garcia V (eds) *Women Policing Across the Globe: Shared Challenges and Successes in the Integration of Women Police Worldwide* Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, pp 49-66.

Van Den Brink M (2009) *Behind the scenes of science. Gender practices in the recruitment and selection of professors in The Netherlands*. Nijmegen: Radboud University Nijmegen.

Van Der Lippe T, Graumans A and Sevenhuijsen S (2004) Gender policies and the position of women in the police force in European countries *Journal of European Social Policy* 14 (4): 391-405.

Van Ewijk A (2011) Diversity within Police Forces in Europe: A Case for the Comprehensive View. *Policing* 6: 76-92.

Yancey Martin P (2003) "Said and Done" versus "Saying and Doing": Gendering Practices, Practicing Gender at Work. *Gender and Society* 17 (3): 342-366.