

## Gender Equality in policing

### *Why is it important?*

Globally, we are witnessing an encouraging momentum toward creating a more balanced public safety service powered partially by a growing appreciation of the valuable professional qualities that women often bring to law enforcement. However, despite women being in law enforcement for over a hundred years, they still face discrimination and harassment. Policewomen often encounter a “glass ceiling”, meaning they can advance in their careers as far as the imposed ceiling will allow. Some of them are even being harassed by their fellow officers. All of these at the loss of the citizens the police should serve. Women are found to respond more effectively to incidents of violence against women, which make up approximately half of the calls to police in some countries. Also, research indicates that women are less likely to use excessive force or pull their weapon. In South East Europe, women represent between 3,5 and 7,5% of uniformed police officers with only a handful in management positions. In the region, policewomen feel that they were not treated equally to their men colleagues and do not have equal career opportunities.

Since 2010, UNDP SEESAC has been working with police officers and their institutions in South East Europe to make women a fundamental part of contemporary police. Building upon a network established by policewomen in the region themselves, SEESAC developed Building “Support for Gender Mainstreaming in Policing Practice in South East Europe” project in June 2010. The project aimed at growing the capacity of the established network into a mechanism envisaged to serve as an advisory body to the region’s police services on matters related to gender equality and policing.

## Our current work on Gender Equality in policing

### *Sharing expertise from the Western Balkans to the world*

The Women Police Officers Network (WPON) was established by women representatives in police services in the Western Balkans with SEESAC’s assistance. Its’ success in raising the awareness on the position of women in police services and the development and implementation of sustainable solutions for the improvement of recruitment and retention of women personnel became a uniquely powerful practical example of the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Today, policewomen who are WPON members are being invited around the world to share their expertise on making gender equality the norm in the institutions they serve. For example, WPON experts shared their experience on the role of the police in combatting violence against women and girls in Central Asia, trained the National Army of the Republic of Moldova on gender equality or shared WPON as a best practice in the Republic of Korea. This knowledge exchange on mainstreaming gender equality in law enforcement from the Western Balkans to the world is enabled by SEESAC’s Regional Security Sector Reform Platform. Find out more about this global expertise sharing mechanism [here](#).

## What have we achieved?

### *A network for change*

The Women Police Officers Network (WPON) was established with the support of SEESAC in November 2010 under the umbrella of the Southeast Europe Police Chiefs Association by high ranking women representatives of nine police services in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia. WPON’s mission was to place gender at the top of the agenda of the police reform in the region. It served as a platform for knowledge and experience change across police services in the region on the status, needs and priorities of policewomen in South East Europe, an advocacy mechanism for promoting gender equality in the policing and as an advisory mechanism on the gender- efficient implementation of international agreements.

### *Essential information sharing*

Gender discrimination in police institutions is a topic rarely addressed. WPON created a safe space for policewomen to share their knowledge and expertise and to feel heard and understood. WPON members realized the importance of local-level association for women police officers since they spend most of their work time in men dominated environments. Two local associations of women police officers were established by WPON members from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Associations not only enable peer support and information exchange but, more importantly, boost confidence and create networks which in turn ensure better gender integration and systematic change.

### *Groundbreaking research*

The absence of data leads to ineffective policies that perpetuate gender gaps and prevent citizens from getting the safety they need from institutions like the police. One of the striking achievements of the “Support for Gender Mainstreaming in Policing Practice in South East Europe” project was the Establishing the Southeast Europe Women Police Officers – Research Findings regional report. This publication brought to light some data for bringing systematic changes in the police institutions in South East Europe. For example, data showed that women only represented between 3,5 and 7,5% of uniformed police officers in South East Europe with only a handful in management positions. It also enabled identify certain trends. For examples, the fact that although fewer women than men enrolled in police academies, they were on average as or more successful than their male colleagues.

### *Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Policing*

Data from the above-mentioned groundbreaking researches served as the reference point for the development of The Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Policing with an Emphasis on Recruitment, Selection and Professional Development of Women in Police Services by WPON members. The Guidelines were designed as a manual for police managers at all levels, particularly those working in departments responsible for education, human resources and public relations, or other officials within the Ministry of

Interior and the police who handle recruitment, admission, selection, and professional development. They propose a set of simple and low-cost measures, which will help police services in South East Europe attract and retain more qualified women and advance gender equality.

#### *Professional Development*

WPON enabled policewomen to grow their professional skills. Workshops were organized to raise the awareness of WPON members on gender equality, security sector reform, and to strengthen their capacities for gender mainstreaming and develop their advocacy skills. These training enabled policewomen to enhance their skills when it comes to gender-sensitive analysis, argument development, presentation skills, message design and management. WPON also facilitated the exchange of information on educational opportunities for policewomen like training and scholarships.

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