

Police Reform and Gender

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There is strong recognition that security sector reform (SSR) should meet the different security needs of men, women, boys and girls. The integration of gender issues is also key to the effectiveness and accountability of the security sector, and to local ownership and legitimacy of SSR processes.

This Practice Note provides a short introduction to the benefits of integrating gender issues into police reform, as well as practical information on doing so.

This Practice Note is based on a longer Tool, and both are part of the **Gender and SSR Toolkit**. Designed to provide an introduction to gender issues for SSR practitioners and policymakers, the Toolkit includes 12 Tools with corresponding Practice Notes – see *More information*.

Why is gender important to police reform?

Police Reform is the transformation or change of a police organisation into a professional and accountable police service practising a style of policing that is responsive to the needs of local communities.¹

Gender refers to the roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours and values that society ascribes to men and women. 'Gender' therefore refers to *learned* differences between men and women, while 'sex' refers to the *biological* differences between males and females. Gender roles vary widely within and across cultures, and can change over time. Gender refers not simply to women or men but also to the relationship between them.

Effective provision of security to men, women, girls and boys

- As police are responsible for the maintenance of public order and the protection of people, they have a duty to understand and take action to prevent and respond to the different forms of crime and insecurity faced by men, women, girls and boys.
- Gender-based violence (GBV), including domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual assault, is one of greatest threats to human security worldwide. Police officers must receive appropriate training to respond to victims of GBV and process and investigate these crimes effectively.

Representative police service

- Creating a police service that is representative of the population it seeks to serve – in terms of ethnicity, sex, religion, language, tribal affiliation etc. – increases the credibility, trust and legitimacy of the service in the eyes of the public.
- A representative police service increases operational effectiveness, through access to a broad range of skills, experiences, education and culture, which maximises the ability to deliver local solutions to local problems.²
- Women often bring specific skills and strengths to police work, such as the ability to defuse potentially violent situations, minimise the use of force and employ good communication skills.³ In certain contexts, female officers are necessary to perform the cordon and search of women, widen the net of intelligence gathering and assist victims of GBV.
- Globally, men are currently greatly over-represented in the police service. Specific initiatives are therefore needed to increase the recruitment, retention and advancement of female personnel.



Non-discriminatory and human rights promoting police service

- Eliminating discrimination and human rights violations, such as sexual harassment and rape, by police personnel against civilians and co-workers will help create an effective and productive work environment.
- Discriminatory attitudes of police personnel can prevent equal access to police services. In many countries, women report that the police are insensitive and may fail to adequately investigate gender-based crimes.⁴ Gender-responsive policies, protocols and capacity building can increase police professionalism and access to police services.

Compliance with obligations under international laws and instruments

Taking the initiative to integrate gender issues into police reform is not only a matter of operational effectiveness; it is necessary to comply with international and regional laws, instruments and norms concerning security and gender. Key instruments include:

- *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW, 1979)
- *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995)

For more information, please see the Toolkit's Annex on International and Regional Laws and Instruments.

How can gender be integrated into police reform?

Assessment

- Conduct gender-responsive assessments or audits that focus specifically on a gender issue, such as women's recruitment, rates of sexual harassment or responses to domestic violence.

Gender-sensitive policies, protocols and procedures

- Develop and implement specific protocols/procedures to investigate, prosecute and support victims of GBV.
- Establish gender-responsive codes of conduct and policies on discrimination, sexual harassment and violence perpetrated by police officers, and internal and external reporting mechanisms that can receive complaints.
- Vet police recruits for histories of GBV, including domestic violence.
- Create incentive structures to award gender-responsive policing along with respect for human rights.
- Review operational frameworks, protocols, and procedures with:
 - Existing women's police associations and other police personnel associations to identify the current situation and reforms required.
 - Community policing boards, civil society organisations, including women's groups and survivors of violence, to identify needed reforms and to ensure that protocols and procedures are responsive to community needs.

Women's police stations/domestic violence units

- Consider establishing women's police stations (WPS) or specific units on GBV in order to encourage more victims to file complaints and improve police responses to GBV (see Box 1).

Gender training

- Integrate gender issues into the basic training given to all police personnel, including civilian staff.
- Provide mandatory and comprehensive training on gender sensitivity and sexual harassment for all police personnel.
- Offer in-depth, skill-building training on specific gender topics, such as interviewing victims of human trafficking and protocols for responding to domestic violence, anti-gay violence, child abuse and sexual assault.

Box 1

Women's Police Stations (WPS) in Latin America ⁵

A study conducted in 2003 of WPS in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay found that each structure is unique and serves a different segment of the population, depending on the country and the criminal laws. Although there are differences, the main characteristics are as follows:

- Most deal with domestic or family violence against women, boys and girls.
- Services are provided in partnership with state and non-state actors.
- Police services include processing of declarations, carrying out investigations and the mediation of agreements in partnership with social workers.
- WPS officers are exclusively women.
- There is no cost to the user for accessing the multi-disciplinary services.

WPS units aim to:

- Protect women against threats to their security.
- Provide access to legal, medical and psychological support services that users, most often the poor, may not otherwise have access to.
- Contribute to a gendered focus on security in general.
- Contribute to good governance through ongoing collaboration between women's movements and NGOs, the police, and in some cases state-run women's mechanisms in the areas of service provision, coordination and administration.
- Collect data on crimes that are addressed by the specialised WPS units.

Recruitment, retention and advancement of female personnel

- Consider establishing strategic targets for female recruitment and retention.
- Update recruitment policies and practices to ensure they are attracting a full range of qualified individuals, including from under-represented groups (see Box 2).
- Update job descriptions to accurately reflect the skills required in modern policing.
- Revise and adapt human resources policies to ensure they are non-discriminatory, gender-sensitive and family-friendly.
- Establish female police associations and mentor programmes.
- Review job assessment standards and promotion criteria for discrimination. Implement performance-based assessment reviews.
- Ensure equal access to job training for career advancement.

Civil society oversight and collaboration

- Consider community-based policing as an effective strategy for providing security and working collaboratively with the community, including civil society organisations such as women's groups (e.g. through joint training and patrolling).
- Establish referral systems for police to put victims in contact with community services including women's organisations.
- Create or strengthen civilian oversight mechanisms, such as community police boards, in order to increase public trust and establish formal channels of communication between the police and the community.
- Build the capacity of civil society organisations to effectively monitor the police for human rights violations.

Also available in Tool 2...

- Template for plan of action for gender reform
- Sample protocol agreement between the police and a community group
- Good practices for addressing GBV
- Gender checklist for community-based policing
- Tips on how to conduct a workplace environmental assessment
- Checklist for developing a job description
- Strategies to recruit, retain and advance female personnel
- Checklist for sexual harassment policies

Post-conflict challenges and opportunities

In post-conflict countries, there is often widespread insecurity, with certain forms of violence increasing. Police services may be close to total collapse or lack legitimacy due to participation in the conflict. There is often an urgent need for systematic reform of the police, including to prevent high incidence of post-conflict GBV.

Challenges for the integration of gender issues

- The police have often perpetrated violent crimes, including rape and sexual assault, against community members, which leads to high rates of distrust. In such cases it may be hard to recruit women and reporting on GBV tends to be low.

Box 2

Education support for female police recruits in Liberia⁶

In Liberia, the United Nations and the Government of Liberia have instituted the Education Support Programme for potential female recruits to the Liberia National Police (LNP). The accelerated programme aims to bring the educational level of interested women up to high school graduation level so that they can qualify for LNP recruitment. As Alan Doss, head of the UN Mission in Liberia, stated at the programme launch to young women of Liberia: 'This is an opportunity to not only enhance your education, but, if you successfully pass the test, you can join the LNP and help make a difference to your country, especially the women of this country.'

- Police institutions are often suspicious of civil society organisations and are reluctant to work with them.
- National police often work in difficult conditions without equipment and with poor pay, while still being expected to carry out their changing mandates, often resulting in a reluctance to prioritise reform processes, including gender reforms.
- Commitment to gender-responsive police reform diminishes as crime begins to rise and police return to oppressive ways of addressing crime, disadvantaging certain groups in society.
- The national police force are not the only agents involved in policing – private security companies, militias and armed non-state actors need to be included in gender-responsive security sector reform efforts.

Opportunities for the integration of gender issues

- International attention and financial support can influence the reform process to be sensitive to the needs of men and women, particularly international civilian police forces acting as role models.
- Altered gender roles and social structures provide a space for more women to consider the police as a professional opportunity.
- Extensive reform of the police service provides the opportunity to set targets for female recruitment, vet recruits for GBV, and integrate gender issues into new policies and protocols, operational programming and training.
- There may be an increased number of women available for employment with the police – including women heading and supporting households, and female former combatants.
- Due to the high levels of GBV in conflict and post-conflict environments, there may be impetus to set up specialised units to address violence against women and children, as in Afghanistan, Liberia and Sierra Leone (see Box 3).

Sierra Leone went through a decade-long conflict where GBV was used as a method of warfare. Women and girls were subjected to abduction, exploitation, abuse, mutilation and torture. In addition to crimes of war, a study by Human Rights Watch (HRW) for the period of 1998-2000 indicated that 70% of the women interviewed reported being beaten by their male partner, with 50% having been forced to have sexual intercourse. Not only were the abuses taking place, but there was a culture of silence that surrounded GBV. Research indicates that 60% of the women surveyed by HRW believed that women deserve to be beaten by their husbands, a perception that needed to be challenged.

As the culture of secrecy began to be broken, there has been a growing recognition that survivors need access to the police to report crimes, protection in temporary shelters, medical and psychological treatment and legal assistance. However, police attitudes to survivors of sexual violence were not supportive, resulting in many women not wanting to report the crimes to the police. In response, the Government established the first Family Support Unit in 2001 to deal with physical assault, sexual assault and cruelty to children. In addition, training was provided to police officers on how to handle domestic and sexual violence.

? Questions for police reform

One of the best ways to identify entry points, strengths and weaknesses for incorporating gender perspectives into police reform is to conduct an assessment. Below are sample questions on gender that are important to include in police reform assessment, monitoring and evaluation processes.

- Are there operational frameworks, policies, procedures or other mechanisms in place to guide police responses to GBV?
- Do gender-responsive codes of conduct and comprehensive policies on sexual harassment exist? Are they enforced? Is their implementation monitored?
- Do police personnel receive adequate capacity building on gender issues?
- Are internal and external complaint mechanisms established and accessible? Is there an ombudsperson in place to receive complaints of sexual harassment, discrimination or violence?
- Do any civilian oversight bodies exist, such as community police boards? Do they monitor GBV and discrimination?
- What is the number and rank of female and male police personnel?
- Are there measures in place to increase the recruitment, retention and advancement of female police personnel, as well as other under-represented groups? Are recruitment processes non-discriminatory? Do female police officers receive equal pay and benefits?
- Do women and men, in both urban and rural settings, have access to police services?
- Are there community policing programmes or initiatives in place?

More information

Resources

Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System – *Handbook for Police Responding to Domestic Violence: Promoting Safer Communities by Integrating Research and Practice*, 2004.

Council of Europe – *The VIP Guide: Vision, Innovation and Professionalism in Policing Violence Against Women and Children*, 2001.

International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Police – *Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice: Resource Manual*, 1999.

National Centre for Women and Policing – *Recruiting and Retaining Women: A Self-Assessment Guide for Law Enforcement*, 2001.

OECD-DAC – *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice*, 2007.

UNIFEM/UNDP – *Gender Sensitive Police Reform in Post-Conflict Situations – a policy briefing paper*, 2007.

Organisations

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative - www.humanrightsinitiative.org

European Network of Police Women - www.enp.nl

International Association of Women Police - www.iawp.org

National Center for Women and Policing - www.womenandpolicing.org

Open Society Justice Initiative - www.justiceinitiative.org

OSCE Strategic Police Matters Unit - www.osce.org/spmu/

UNIFEM - www.unifem.org

Gender and SSR Toolkit

1. Security Sector Reform and Gender
 2. Police Reform and Gender
 3. Defence Reform and Gender
 4. Justice Reform and Gender
 5. Penal Reform and Gender
 6. Border Management and Gender
 7. Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector and Gender
 8. National Security Policy-Making and Gender
 9. Civil Society Oversight of the Security Sector and Gender
 10. Private Military and Security Companies and Gender
 11. SSR Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation and Gender
 12. Gender Training for Security Sector Personnel
- Annex on International and Regional Laws and Instruments

Each of these Tools and Practice Notes are available from: www.dcaf.ch, www.un-instraw.org and www.osce.org/odihr.

This Practice Note was prepared by Anna Korneeva of UN-INSTRAW, based upon Tool 2 authored by Tara Denham.

¹ Groenewald, H. and Peake, G., *Police Reform through Community-Based Policing: Philosophy and Guidelines for Implementation*, (International Peace Academy: New York), 2004, p.1.

² United Kingdom Police Home Office, 'It works... The Operational Benefits of Diversity for the Police Service', 2005, p.4. http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/human-resources/Operational_Benefits_Leaflet.pdf

³ Lonsway, K. et al., *Hiring & Retaining More Women: The Advantages to Law Enforcement Agencies*, National Center for Women & Policing, 2003.

⁴ UNIFEM, *Not a Minute More: Ending Violence Against Women*, (UNIFEM: New York), 2003, p. 46.

⁵ Jubb, N. and Izumino, W.P., 'Women and Policing in Latin America: A revised Background Paper', (Latin American Studies Association: Texas), 27-29 March 2003. <http://www.nevusp.org/downloads/down085.pdf>

⁶ United Nations Mission in Liberia, 'Launching of Special Education Programme for Potential Female Recruits of Liberia National Police', Press Release Jan. 22, 2007. <http://unmil.org/article.asp?id=1951>