

## Women Police Leaders in Europe: A Tale of Prejudice and Patronage

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Keywords:	women police, police leadership, patronage, gender discrimination, European police, prejudice
Abstract:	<p>This paper provides rich and unique insights into the experiences of women police leaders across seven European regions. Drawing on interview data it presents accounts of women's experiences of pursuing advancement in policing and identifies informal and formal barriers to female advancement in European police organisations. Women police leaders report high levels of gender discrimination, obstruction and prejudice over the course of their careers. It argues that there are a number of subjective and informal criteria of 'acceptability' that shape women's experiences of promotion and that informal patronage is a strong basis from which strategic appointments are made within European police systems. The paper makes sense of the ways in which informal aspects of career progression function alongside formal promotion criteria to preserve men as the 'ideal' candidates for police leadership positions, resulting in a preference for other men and the exclusion of women. The relevance of these findings is key to informing the future selection and development of police leaders in an increasingly complex police landscape.</p>

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## 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

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3 wider policy context of gender equality within Europe and consider the position of  
4 women within European police organisations. The final section of the paper  
5 documents our findings. Here, we draw on women's experiences of a career in  
6 policing and reflect upon their progression through the ranks. The majority of women  
7 we interviewed reported examples of gender stereotyping, discrimination, obstruction,  
8 prejudice and patronage over the course of their careers. Our starting point is that  
9 organisations are guided by both formal and informal rules and whilst we accept the  
10 importance of formal systems, it is not our intention to detail the formal promotion  
11 criteria across European police organisations. Rather, we aim to shed light on the  
12 ways in which subjective and informal criteria of 'acceptability' shape women's  
13 experiences of promotion. We argue that informal patronage is a strong basis from  
14 which strategic appointments are made within European police systems. Whilst this  
15 impacts adversely on the fairness of promotion systems for both women and men, we  
16 emphasise that the power of informal patronage is experienced more acutely by  
17 women looking to secure promotion to higher ranks.

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

### 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 Methodological note:

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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>. XX carried out 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:](#)

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<sup>1</sup> This data is drawn from previous research conducted by XX on police leadership in Europe. XX kindly gave permission to the authors to use this data for this article.

- 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),

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3 Benelux (Be, 11), British Isles (BI, 10), Central Europe (C, 22), Mediterranean (M, 22)  
4 and Nordic (N, 20)<sup>2</sup>.  
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8 The usual caveats that accompany the difficulties in undertaking comparative work  
9 also apply to our analysis. The first is that ranks do not transfer between different  
10 countries easily making comparative analysis between countries difficult. Rank terms  
11 vary considerable across European police forces, and translations of them into  
12 English do not always give an adequate meaning or a correct cultural resonance. For  
13 example, XX (2015: 18) point to the complications using the rank of commissioner.  
14 This title can refer to a low junior management rank in Poland or a command rank in  
15 Belgium or France. Participants were self-selecting in that respondents were asked  
16 whether their roles involved strategic police responsibilities. Inevitably officers  
17 involved in this study were in senior management positions equivalent to the ranks of  
18 Chief Inspector/Superintendent and higher in a UK context.  
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28 Other problems encountered in this comparative analysis is in relation to the diverse  
29 structure, culture and approach of police bodies in different jurisdictions. Inevitably,  
30 these characteristics are influenced by social, political and economic histories, as well  
31 as through the different relationships between the police and the state (Mawby, 1999).  
32 In this respect the existing evidence base is not only challenging but is difficult to build  
33 and use for comparison. The aim is to investigate what common insights can be drawn  
34 from women police leaders in different jurisdictions. Finally, we acknowledge that the  
35 original research remit was not specifically aimed at female officers but was concerned  
36 with capturing the private thoughts of strategic police leaders in general in relation to  
37 the following areas: the processes of progression and promotion within the  
38 organisation; accountability of police services; cooperation between police  
39 organisations; contemporary crime concerns; and, challenges for the future of policing.  
40 A keen interest to explore what sort of people make the key decisions at the top of  
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52 <sup>2</sup> The research was not restricted to the EU but included non-members such as Switzerland and Norway  
53 because they are integral parts of any European policing 'system'. Standard regional groupings have  
54 been based on socio-economic and geographic associations: **Alpine**: Austria, Switzerland,  
55 Liechtenstein, Slovenia Germany; **Baltic**: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; **Benelux**: Belgium, the  
56 Netherlands and Luxembourg; **British Isles**: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle  
57 of Man, and the Republic of Ireland; **Central Europe**: Czech Republic, Poland, Romanian, Slovakia &  
58 Hungary; **Mediterranean**: Portugal, Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,  
59 Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Malta and the British territory of Gibraltar; **Nordic**:  
60 Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark & Iceland.

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3 policing together with an appreciation of the processes of their advancement,  
4 inevitably led us to a discussion of the importance of gender. [Despite a focus on](#)  
5 [women's narratives in this paper, we incorporate men's views where appropriate to](#)  
6 [the discussion.](#)  
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## 10 11 **Gender Equality and Policing in Europe**

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13 Dealt with on a national, European and international level, the development of gender  
14 and anti-discrimination policy is multifaceted. In her work on comparative gender and  
15 policy in Europe, Mazur (2009) emphasises the complex and differential meanings of  
16 gender equality across different jurisdictions. In relation to mapping the progress of  
17 gender equality within Europe, again, sources invariably use their own definition and  
18 carry limitations, making it difficult to make comparisons across countries. One thing  
19 we can be sure of is that the equalities architecture across the European Union (EU)  
20 has grown exponentially over the past decade and there has been a concerted effort  
21 to advance equality through the mainstreaming of gender equality principles into all  
22 EU policies and programmes. The recent *European Commission's Strategic*  
23 *Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019* sets the framework for improving equality  
24 between women and men, with a focus on key priorities, including: increasing women's  
25 economic independence; reducing the gender gaps in pay and pensions; addressing  
26 poverty among women; and promoting equality between women and men in decision-  
27 making. We concern ourselves with the latter and whilst decision making in this  
28 context refers predominantly to women in political decision-making careers, such  
29 decision-making has much resonance with those in police leadership roles. Despite  
30 the difficulties in using cross-country data sets, there is a strong consensus that  
31 women remain woefully under-represented in political decision making at local,  
32 national and European levels. The Gender Equality Index developed by the European  
33 Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), shows that although 'power' is the area where  
34 most progress has been made in the past 10 years, it is also the area where the gender  
35 gap remains widest. Men continue to dominate in every EU Member State's national  
36 parliament. With a score of 100 equalling gender balance, Sweden is currently the  
37 only EU country to score over 90 on the 'political power' indicator, which is based on  
38 the share of women ministers, members of parliament and women in regional  
39 assemblies. Figures from the European Parliamentary Research Service (2019)  
40 indicate that when it comes to the members of national governments of Member  
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3 States, Spain, Sweden and France lead the way in upholding the standards of equality,  
4 with 52.4 %, 52.2 % and 48.6 % of women respectively. Hungary and Malta are trailing  
5 with a mere 7.1 % and 12 % of women each. Cyprus and Italy also have very low  
6 numbers of women in government, 16.7 %, followed closely by Poland with 17 %.  
7 Interestingly, despite the persistent under-representation of women in decision-  
8 making in politics, findings from the *Special Eurobarometer Survey on Gender Equality*  
9 (2017) suggest that 84% of respondents (including 80% of men) consider gender  
10 equality important to them personally and support a fairer distribution of power with 70  
11 % of Europeans in favour of legal measures to ensure parity between women and men  
12 in politics and 86 % think that they can be represented by female politicians.  
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22 A global review of women's representation in policing also demonstrates their under-  
23 representation within the police workforce, particularly at senior levels. The percentage  
24 of women in policing in the United States has remained relatively stagnant for the past  
25 twenty years, comprising less than 13% of total officers and a much smaller proportion  
26 in leadership positions (Schuck, 2019). In Canada, women comprise 21% of sworn  
27 officers in 2017 (Conor, 2017). In New Zealand, women made up almost 33% of police  
28 recruits in 2016, with 14 % serving in chief officer roles of superintendent and above.  
29 In Australia, 33.2% of police staff (sworn and unsworn) in 2016-2017 were women  
30 (Australia ROGS, 2018).  
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39 Across Europe, there is considerable divergence in the representation of women in  
40 policing. Whilst some countries have gone beyond 25% - Estonia, Latvia, Ireland,  
41 Germany, Spain, and England and Wales. Several nation-states have reported  
42 percentages of officers being at or below 15%, including Belgium, Finland, France,  
43 Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, Greece, Austria, Denmark and Luxembourg (Prenzler and  
44 Sinclair, 2013). All in all, there is a lack of evidence of a fully integrated police  
45 organisation anywhere in Europe, where women represent 50% of the officer  
46 workforce and enjoy an equivalent share of the full range of roles and ranks within the  
47 police hierarchy (Van Ewijk, 2011). Diversity remains low in general and diminishes as  
48 police officers' rank increases. Research on Estonia for example, indicates that whilst  
49 women constitute 38% of police officers, only 12% serve at higher rank (Van Ewijk,  
50 2011). In 2012, Europol launched its own gender-balance project to explore the lack  
51 of women in leadership positions. With women accounting for 35% of Europol staff,  
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3 only 0.5% of those are in middle or senior management, although it is noteworthy that  
4 Catherine De Bolle has recently been made Director of Europol (2018). A further  
5 report by SEESAC (2015) indicates that only a few women occupy senior level  
6 positions in police services in South East Europe. With only a few women occupying  
7 most of the uniformed and commissioned women held lower level positions (SEESAC,  
8 2015). There are however some outliers here with some jurisdictions in Europe  
9 indicating a more balanced landscape. Currently forming 30% of the overall police  
10 workforce and 27% of chief officers, women police serving in England and Wales have  
11 been hailed a success story. As is the case in France where Pruvost (2009) documents  
12 the high number of women serving in the leadership rank of *Commissaire*; indeed  
13 there are more women at the top of the hierarchy than in the lower ranks of the French  
14 Police, but this is deliberate policy with women being recruited directly to command  
15 rank. With a strong reputation for gender equality, the Swedish police service has also  
16 done much to attract women into policing and into leadership positions through  
17 appointing them as non-sworn employees - about 40% of all employees in the Swedish  
18 Police are women and among police officers specifically, they form 25%. The number  
19 of female leaders has also increased this past decade and in 2010 approximately 22%  
20 of police officers are women who are leaders at different levels (The National Police  
21 Board, 2008 cited in Osterlind & Haake, 2010).

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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



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

21 It is typical of the arrogant chauvinism which characterises the police as an  
22 occupation and which, as a woman and a feminist, I have had to fight against  
23 from the day I joined. [Interviewee M37]  
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28 Traditional and pejorative stereotypical attitudes about women were echoed by  
29 another woman from the same region:

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32 The majority of my peers are against women [...] and one of them said to me  
33 that I should be "in the kitchen, pregnant". Yes, like this. I asked him "Where  
34 do you keep your brain? In your arse?" He was angry but his attitude is so  
35 stupid and old fashioned. [Interviewee M14]  
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38 The following strategic police leaders from the Central Europe Region recall the often  
39 explicit and personal judgements made on their physical appearance:

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43 I have had difficulties with my peers. All at this level are male and I am female,  
44 so at all points there is male dominance and that can make relationships very  
45 uncomfortable. Some, though not all, of my colleagues seem to feel threatened  
46 by me and I have to suffer comments about how I look and how I smell. They  
47 do not say those things to each other. I could say (but I do not) that they look  
48 like lumps in their uniforms and they smell pretty bad. [Interviewee C87]  
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51 It makes me angry that [male police officers] think like the newspapers and  
52 journals with some sort of God-given right to talk about how I look, not about  
53 what I do. This would not be the case with a male chief: they would not  
54 discuss his hair, his nails, make-up and weight! [Interviewee C6]  
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58 In our study, women conceived of themselves as threats to the status quo. A  
59 characteristic comment from a female police leader in Central Europe:  
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5 I am surrounded by male values and male colleagues, which can be hard as a  
6 woman because you are expected to play by the rules of their game and not  
7 by any of your own rules. I do not have support from my peers and I would not  
8 expect any. They see me as a threat. In fact, I am glad to be a threat because  
9 this may open the way for other women to follow me who may do better than I  
10 have managed. [Interviewee C71]  
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14 Another from the Baltic Region noted that whilst some of her male colleagues were  
15 supportive, there was nonetheless a visceral opposition to her appointment:  
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19 My relationship with my peers is mixed. Some are still deeply chauvinistic and  
20 regard my presence in the carpeted corridors with horror and concern, but  
21 others are strong supports and are delighted that a woman has broken through  
22 the 'blue ceiling'. [Interviewee Ba76]  
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26 Even in the Nordic region and in the British Isles famed for their gender equality, female  
27 police leaders register a struggle to be seen as equal to their male colleagues. Whilst  
28 these women may no longer face or experience the visible and audible hostility of their  
29 European counterparts, they do continue to experience the processes of gendered  
30 inclusion and exclusion, albeit in more subtle ways, as indicated by the following:  
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35 As a woman, it is always more difficult to prove that you can do a job in a world  
36 dominated by men's rules, like policing is. [Interviewee N68]  
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40 I had a picture of myself being "the leader of a group" long before I became a  
41 police officer. In the police organisation I later found out that women were not  
42 chiefs, so it became for me a struggle for years before finding the path to the  
43 top. I knew that I wanted to stake a claim in the system and I looked for the  
44 educational qualifications that would give me the knowledge and skills..  
45 attaining this proof of my ability. [Interviewee N45]  
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49 Data reported by Caless on a female chief from the British Isles (2011:45) further  
50 emphasises the position:  
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53 They might give you [strategic police leadership] of some smaller force, but  
54 nothing substantial ... I'm horrified frankly that such attitudes are not more  
55 robustly challenged.... [T]he irony is that it is in the top jobs that this happens,  
56 not in the lower ranks.  
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3 This final observation from the British Isles was recorded before the promotion of  
4 women to arguably the most senior police roles in the UK. Since data collection, a  
5 number of significant gains for women in strategic police roles can be observed,  
6 including the appointment of Sarah Thornton (until recently Chair of the National  
7 Police Chief Council), Cressida Dick (London Metropolitan Police Commissioner) and  
8 Lynne Owens (Director of the National Crime Agency). Although this does create  
9 more visibility for female police leaders and may contribute to positive changes for  
10 women in the police, this does not necessarily change the broader picture of  
11 stagnation in the recruitment and mobility of women in the police.  
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20 The high visibility of women in policing is accompanied by an increased expectation  
21 of failure as observed by the following woman in the Central Europe Region:  
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25 I wish to say that there are not enough women in my police service. About  
26 10%. It is so very hard to come to the top in such a system, weighted for men  
27 not for women. Many seemed to think when I was appointed, that in a very few  
28 moments I would fail, and they watch hungrily for this to happen. But it does  
29 not. I go on and I succeed and I even get promoted. Such people now look a  
30 little bit sick because I was not a disaster like they said. [Interviewee C91]  
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35 For many, the struggle and resistance has become an accepted and routinised feature  
36 of a police career and is described as one that women need to learn to live with if they  
37 seek promotion to leadership:  
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41 My mother told me I was a fool to enter policing and she may have been right.  
42 It has been the hell of a struggle to succeed and climb up. [Interviewee C94]  
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46 I tell all the females who aspire to high office that they have to put up with  
47 personal attacks, anti-female attitudes, expectations of failure or weakness  
48 and patronising comments all the time. They will have to learn to ride with  
49 them, but if you want to get to the top, this is the price [you pay] for it.  
50 [Interviewee C86; our interpolation in square brackets]  
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53 Perceptions of resistance within our study are firmly located within the police service  
54 itself and not in the broader criminal justice system or beyond, with some respondents,  
55 like this Nordic Region leader, forcefully noting the stubborn 'masculine ethos' within  
56 the function of policing:  
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3 Having begun the steep climb in the police, I was as determined to become a  
4 chief police officer as friends of mine were to be judges or ministers or TV  
5 executives. Some places are easier to succeed in, like universities which  
6 practise equality. Others, like the police and military are much harder to break  
7 open. So, I feel good that I have done this. [Interviewee N52]  
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10 A respondent from Central Europe specifically draws attention to the prominence of  
11 experiential factors over intellectual ones as being characteristic of policing values  
12 and a root cause of gendered prejudice:  
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16 In the larger CJS world, I do not meet this kind of [gender] prejudice. There  
17 are some female judges and plenty of clever female lawyers, and I get on very  
18 well with most of them, and with the male lawyers...Several of the lawyers tell  
19 me that they cannot believe that the police is still so old-fashioned but they  
20 forget that the law makes you an intellectual equal because of your brain. In  
21 policing in my country, what makes you equal is being a practitioner and being  
22 clever comes a long way second. [Interviewee C72]  
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27 Women working in policing have long been aligned with undertaking stereotypical  
28 roles associated with the domestic sphere. If we adopt a historical lens, early  
29 policewomen's presence in policing was only enabled through a focus on social and  
30 welfare work tasks, working with female suspects, victims of crime and young people  
31 (Brown & Heidensohn, 2000). Over a century later, our data suggest that such an  
32 association remains. The notion that policewomen should deal only with 'morality'  
33 crimes is remarkably persistent, as encountered by a prominent strategic police leader  
34 from the Mediterranean Region:  
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41 I could not believe when this politician asked me if I did women's crimes. "What  
42 are those?" I asked and he said "Oh, you know, kids and sex crime, that sort".  
43 I told him very strongly that I was a police leader and that meant [I dealt with]  
44 all crime and that he really ought to try visiting the twenty-first century from time  
45 to time, because the world I live in seems very different from his. [Interviewee  
46 M14; our interpolation in square brackets]  
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51 The following officers from the Central Europe and Mediterranean Regions  
52 encountered the same kind of embedded cultural hostility to the proposition that  
53 women can become effective police leaders:  
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57 I wanted to be a chief officer from very early on in my career, but policing is a  
58 very male world and as long as I did "women's policing" (sex offence  
59 investigation, missing children, liaison, community) everyone was OK and I was  
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3 commended and promoted. But, as soon as I tried to go into the Detective  
4 Branch [in a senior role], there were objections. [Interviewee C6]  
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7 Of course, everywhere there was prejudice against women and for a long time  
8 I was given only 'morality' crimes involving prostitutes or domestic violence or  
9 children. But I am very determined and so slowly I rose until now I do have  
10 strategic command. [Interviewee M56]  
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14 Such views are perhaps not so surprising when we consider findings from the  
15 *Special Eurobarometer Survey (2017)* that evidences the persistent and stubborn  
16 nature of the public's gendered expectations of the domestic sphere. Compared to ten  
17 years ago, the report documents the regressive nature of gender equality with 12  
18 countries having moved backwards when it comes to the gender balance in terms of  
19 time spent on care, domestic work and social activities. Clear gendered expectations  
20 in the domestic sphere are prevalent with housekeeping and raising children still  
21 largely considered a woman's role. More than four in ten Europeans (44 %) believe  
22 the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family. Moreover,  
23 in one third of EU Member States this percentage is even 70 % or more.  
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33 The power of such stereotypes is inextricably linked to debates about the 'ideal'  
34 worker within organisations. XX argues that gendered ideas about what makes an  
35 'ideal' police officer and an 'ideal' police leader underpin organisational and individual  
36 belief systems - in both cases, the 'ideal' is male. Such findings are echoed in Barth-  
37 Farkas and Vera's (2018: 56) study of prototypicality, power and gender in the  
38 German police. Drawing on data with 106 male and 34 female officers, their study  
39 offers interesting insights into belief systems of the 'ideal' leader. Described as co-  
40 operative, dominant, honest, strong, and conscientious, the prototypical leader lies in  
41 direct contrast to descriptions of the non-prototypical police leader, perceived as  
42 sensitive, creative, arrogant, charismatic, and critical. Barth-Farkas and Vera  
43 emphasise that respondents, both female and male, described prototypical leaders as  
44 male and dominant and were equally trusting in their endorsement of the male  
45 prototypical leader. Where they differ, however, is that whilst female officers accept  
46 both prototypical and non-prototypical leaders (i.e. both men and women in leadership  
47 roles) the same is not true for male officers, who overwhelmingly accepted only the  
48 male prototypical. With men securing their positions as 'ideal' leaders, it follows  
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3 through that women in or aspiring to leadership positions are viewed as atypical  
4 leaders – again, reconfirming the idea of women as ‘outsiders’ in policing. The  
5 experiences of women reported in this paper suggest the tenacity and intransigent  
6 nature of stereotypes associated with women.  
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## 10 11 12 The Power of Patronage

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

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51 You need a patron or sponsor to help you by mentoring, by encouraging you  
52 to develop your profile by getting the right sorts of jobs to bring you to notice.  
53 Networking is very important, because if you impress the right people with  
54 your skills or your determination, then they will ask for you for a task and then  
55 help you to rise if you are successful. That is the point: if you fail, you will  
56 have no backers or support. This game is all about winning. [Mediterranean  
57 region, male participant 16]  
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3 The lack of an open system is the problem, so people can manipulate the  
4 process to suit themselves and it is not a secret that some leaders select and  
5 groom their successors for many years. The network which picks out and  
6 develops police chiefs needs to be tighter, more structured, less loose, and  
7 above everything we must focus on making sure we have people who have a  
8 strategic command capability. (Interviewee, Ba5, male).  
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11 Selection can be a bit hit or miss, depending on whether the presiding powers  
12 have decided whether you are good or bad, and therefore whether you are  
13 worth investing in. Some of my colleagues were not promoted for a long time  
14 because they had got on the wrong side of someone who was powerful or  
15 whose views were well-regarded, and I guess you never really know what goes  
16 on behind the closed doors when people's aptitudes are being discussed'.  
17 (Interviewee, A1, male).  
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20 The promotion process is still not transparent, as there are sideways routes  
21 involving some sort of favouritism or nepotism: you need to know someone who  
22 knows someone, or be seen to walk the corridor at the time when the person  
23 whose patronage you need is at work. Too many chief police officers look for  
24 their mirror image when choosing their successor. (interviewee, N41, male)  
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29 Described by Caless (2011: 78) as 'the (subjective) capability to identify potential and  
30 advance it by granting opportunities and giving recognition for achievement', we argue  
31 that the power of patronage although experienced by both men and women, is felt  
32 most acutely by women looking to progress to leadership positions. Given the  
33 predominance of men in senior police roles and in the context of such subjective  
34 recruitment methods, we argue that men are better able to assume the position of  
35 both gatekeeper to and beneficiary of leadership roles.  
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43 The senior woman below points to the fundamental problems when considering the  
44 lack of advancement in the face of satisfying the official criteria:  
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47 It is unfair: I did all the required courses but was still not selected ... I had more  
48 experience and qualifications than many of the men who were put forward  
49 above me. There is protection of poor male officers by the system and the  
50 ceiling is very strong, hard to break open ... I know that I can do most chief jobs  
51 given the chance, but the system is loaded against women. (Central Europe,  
52 Female Participant C6).  
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56 Another, from the same Region, thought that her rise in another profession would have  
57 been both more rapid and less obstructed, with equality in policing still dependent on  
58 the support of individuals:  
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4 If I had become a professor in one of our universities, I would have risen more  
5 quickly and more easily, I think. But I have a great satisfaction that I have  
6 become a strategic police leader against all the disapproval. There were  
7 people above me who tried the experiment of promoting me – some very new  
8 to policing themselves – and I am grateful to them for their faith. But it should  
9 not have to be that you rely on a few visionaries to see what you can do and  
10 take [a] chance [on] you. The majority still think women should be home with  
11 babies, I say you need to get real. [Interviewee C91; our interpolations in  
12 square brackets]  
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18 Of concern is that such subjective selection processes are not necessarily seen as  
19 problematic among some strategic leaders, as this male officer reveals:  
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22 'There is no formal selection process system: you are picked to become a  
23 [strategic police leader] on the recommendation of two senior and serving police  
24 leaders so as to avoid any suggestions of bias or favouritism' (Interviewee, A7,  
25 male)  
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28 Recommendations of two senior police officers in selecting officers for promotion is  
29 not indicative of a thorough or fair selection process, as emphasised by the following  
30 female officer serving in a different region:  
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34 'Despite all the new Constitution and progress in other public professions,  
35 policing remains heavily male-dominated. They make the rules and it is hard  
36 for a woman to break through and compete on level terms. To make top rank,  
37 you have to have two recommendations from seniors above you; I have had to  
38 wait much longer than men for my promotions and that is why. So I think it is  
39 an unfair system, biased against women to succeed and we must change this.'  
40 (Interviewee, C72, female).  
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45 The dangers of informal patronage through familiarity exerts a powerful influence over  
46 who gets appointed or promoted and as such disadvantages 'outsiders' to the  
47 dominant group who diverge from the stereotypical leadership ideal. The importance  
48 of such informal support and networks of patronage for women seeking leadership  
49 positions has been well documented by a range of commentators in other working  
50 spheres beyond policing. Schoen et al (2018) point to the considerable benefits of  
51 individual informal networks for women working in academia in supporting overall  
52 career progression, particularly with regard to the speed of promotion. Van Der Brink  
53 (2009) describes the presence of networks of male gatekeepers responsible for  
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3 scouting candidates for professorial appointments. Not only are women overlooked in  
4 the scouting process, but male gatekeepers prefer men because the image of the  
5 academic professor is inextricably intertwined with men and masculinity, thereby  
6 hindering women's access to senior academic positions. Holgersson's (2013: 464)  
7 analysis on male managers in Sweden draws on the concept of homosociality to make  
8 sense of the ways in which informal aspects of career progression function alongside  
9 formal promotion criteria to preserve men as the 'ideal' candidates for leadership  
10 positions. The concept of homosociality has been used to understand power as  
11 gendered and to describe men's preference for other men and the exclusion of  
12 women. She goes on to suggest that despite men's wish to see more women in  
13 leadership positions and an awareness of the adverse career conditions faced by  
14 women, only a few of the male managers she interviewed reflected upon their own  
15 preference for other men. In turn, she suggests that homosociality is often an  
16 'unreflexive practice embedded in organizational structures and cultures, enabling  
17 men to simultaneously reproduce male dominance in management while portraying  
18 themselves as pro-equality'. Reflecting on the dynamics of gendering practices at  
19 work, Yancey Martin (2003: 344) also argues that many gendering practices are done  
20 unreflexively, they 'happen fast, are "in action," and occur on many levels'.  
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36 In their analysis of how candidates are selected for political appointments, Bjarnegård  
37 and Kenny (2016) also emphasise the informal aspects of the selection process and  
38 their gendered consequences. Here they point to the ways in which both formal and  
39 informal party rules and practices are shaped and structured by gender norms –  
40 favouring the model of the 'ideal candidate', who is usually a man. Their comparative  
41 research on Scotland and Thailand draws on the concept of 'clientelism' to explain the  
42 dominance of men in the Scottish Labour Party and the Thai Rak party. Whilst these  
43 are different political parties operating in different geographical contexts, analysis of  
44 the gendered aspects of their candidate selection processes suggests that they are  
45 also marked by some striking similarities. In both instances, successful candidates  
46 are characterised by the building and maintenance of close-knit personal informal  
47 networks. As Bjarnegård and Kenny (2016: 380) note: 'knowing the right local people  
48 and being part of the right local networks is crucial for social acceptance and for being  
49 considered a suitable candidate'. Given that clientelist networks are almost entirely  
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3 male-dominated, they argue that 'informal and masculinist party practices of local  
4 patronage, clientelism and homosociality are maintained' (ibid: 387).  
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8 It seems that aspiring police leaders need to negotiate an increasingly competitive  
9 environment and consider gaining advantages through comprehensive networks,  
10 effective and helpful sponsors and negotiate formal selection processes. XX  
11 summarise the role of patronage for strategic police leaders in Europe when they note  
12 that 'patronage still plays a prominent part in the selection and appointment of strategic  
13 police leaders, and there is strong emerging evidence from interviewees' testimony  
14 that the selection system across Europe continues to rely on such leaders being  
15 spotted early and nurtured by existing chiefs'. This is not to suggest that formal rules  
16 are not important for making sense of the selection of candidates, they are. XX work  
17 on the formal aspects of the police career model in the England and Wales has done  
18 much to expose its discriminatory impacts. She argues that the strictly linear career  
19 model, with its single-entry point and ideology of internal recruitment, has functioned  
20 over the past century to inscribe and maintain the 'heroic male' as the 'ideal' police  
21 leader. Moreover, she argues that the recent introduction of direct entry for senior  
22 ranks should be viewed as a 'disruptive' tool to the gendered order in policing and one  
23 that may impact positively on the number of women working in leadership. Brown et  
24 al (2014) have also argued that female police officers are more likely to access higher  
25 ranks from outside than by moving up internally from the lower ranks. Opening up  
26 alternative routes to police leadership have proved successful in some European  
27 jurisdictions – Sweden, France and the Netherlands are good examples. While the  
28 experience of women leaders appointed in such ways is yet to be fully explored, we  
29 do know that police organisations throughout the world pay much credence to being  
30 an 'insider'. In turn, 'outsiders' find it difficult to command the respect and authority  
31 needed in such leadership roles (Osterlind & Haake, 2010; Van der Lippe et al, 2004).  
32 Perhaps not surprisingly, women appointed under such circumstances risk being  
33 perceived through 'a discourse of tokenism'.  
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#### 54 Conclusion:

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

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29 Speculations about the possible future of women in policing across the globe remain  
30 mixed and there are worrying signs of a 'plateau' effect in relation to women's  
31 progression in policing (Cordner and Cordner, 2011; Prenzler et al, 2010; Prenzler  
32 and Sinclair 2013). In her review of the stagnation of women in policing in the US,  
33 Schuck (2019: 42) calls for the development of metrics and accountability systems,  
34 arguing that 'Police executives need to develop metrics for evaluating organizational  
35 progress regarding increasing the representation of women across all units within the  
36 organization as well as the equality of work attainment between female and male  
37 officers. Objectives must be defined, theories of cause and effect developed, specific  
38 activities identified, data evaluated, and learning feedback loops created'. We concur  
39 with the call for greater formal accounting systems. Our first call is for a systemic  
40 collection of baseline data, with attention to women's position within the police  
41 hierarchy throughout Europe. Although a focus on the numeric is not necessarily an  
42 indicator of success, it is at least a starting point for those wishing to push for greater  
43 gender equality. Schuck (2019: 42) sums this up neatly when she argues that  
44 describing the underrepresentation of women in policing as a problem provides a  
45 convincing case that 'disparities in representation and decision making have  
46 consequences for policing organizations as well as the communities that they serve'.  
47 Such data also affords an opportunity to reflect upon possible change over time and  
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3 will enable a greater analysis of the correlation with wider equality indicators in place,  
4 such as the political power indicator noted above.  
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8 We also call for in-depth quantitative and qualitative empirical research across  
9 European jurisdictions to ascertain both the formal and informal dimensions of the  
10 candidate selection processes. We anticipate that such investigation will allow us to  
11 better understand why some countries are more successful with recruiting, promoting  
12 and retaining women. While those aspiring to leadership positions may seek to  
13 demonstrate skills, knowledge, values and abilities, it is also the context in which  
14 selection takes place and the behaviours that are tolerated or flourish and the  
15 networks in place that frame the environment in which future leaders are  
16 presented and selected and allowed to succeed. Putting gender considerations  
17 aside there is inconsistency in approaches to appointment and development of  
18 leaders in Europe. The value placed on characteristics such as education, experience  
19 and political regimes is different with little agreement about what makes a good leader.  
20 Investigating the institutional dimensions of the opportunity structures within police  
21 organisations is essential in order to explain women's minority status in policing as  
22 well as the persistence of male dominance. We therefore urge those with a remit for  
23 increasing diversity within their organisations to undertake a systematic analysis of  
24 the key points in their career processes, such as recruitment, selection, promotion  
25 boards, recognition systems, rewards structures, assessment tools for potential, and  
26 development programmes, to assess whether there are obstacles here to women  
27 performing on an equal basis with men. At the same time, we encourage further  
28 investigation into the more subjective and informal aspects of selection processes.  
29 We have argued that patronage networks tend to uphold traditional power relations  
30 and work against women pursuing leadership positions, reproducing homosocial  
31 relations.  
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51 Given the prevalence of stereotyping and prejudice experienced by women in our  
52 findings, we further urge a greater focus on exploring men's views on gender equality.  
53 Much of the research on gender and policing has identified the difficulties in combining  
54 work and family responsibilities and the reticence of women to put themselves forward  
55 for promotion. And whilst these are both valid realities, the focus and onus of  
56 responsibility to rise through the police hierarchy lies with individual women and with  
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3 organisations in an abstract sense. Here, organisations are tasked with providing  
4 flexible working patterns to enable women to participate more fully, and in turn women  
5 are individually responsabilised to better manage home and work commitments. They  
6 are also tasked with developing their own confidence in seeking out promotion  
7 opportunities. The failure however to identify men's prejudice and use of stereotypes  
8 of women as key aspects to explain the lack of women in police leadership is a glaring  
9 omission. The extent to which such gendering practices are enacted with intent and  
10 awareness by men has been the subject of considerable debate. Indeed, the growing  
11 interest in identifying and tackling 'unconscious bias' within organisations has been  
12 hailed as a panacea for confronting discriminatory practices. Holgersson (2013:463)  
13 argues that men's own lack of awareness of their own homosocial practices may  
14 indeed go some way toward explaining why diversity initiatives have thus far had  
15 limited success, noting that 'It is not necessarily men's negative perceptions of women  
16 *per se* that lead them to primarily recruit men, but rather their preference for certain  
17 men and the complex web of homosocial relations surrounding management careers  
18 that direct their attention to other men.....the exclusion of women is a latent function  
19 of homosocial processes among men'. Yancey Martin (2003: 355; 357) refers to the  
20 concept of 'liminal awareness' to represent men's mobilization of masculinities without  
21 being conscious of doing so. Through a lack of reflexivity, men are able to mobilize  
22 and practice masculinities without being fully conscious of doing so. As a result, she  
23 argues, the harm experienced by women through such practices is rendered invisible,  
24 leaving men to 'honestly deny' that they are acting in a gendered way. We concur with  
25 Yancey Martin (2003) who argues that practising gender in organisations is informed  
26 by both liminal awareness and non-reflexivity as well as intentionally and reflexively.  
27 As a result, gendered stereotyping, prejudice and practices of informal patronage  
28 within policing and standards will not change without active resistance and challenge  
29 by both women and men.

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51 In conjunction with the police focussed research noted above, we encourage a more  
52 comprehensive examination of the external environment that affect women's  
53 employment patterns. European countries are considerably different in terms of  
54 political, cultural, and social contexts and such variables affect women's ability to enjoy  
55 full political and civil rights, which in turn affects women's employment patterns (Orloff,  
56 1993). Women's positions in organisational life is inseparable from their position in  
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3 wider society. The cultural construction of the role of women more broadly, together  
4 with an appreciation of the gendered differences in wider social provisions, such as  
5 those that deal with the balance of home and work, are substantially different across  
6 space and time, are likely to influence women's employment patterns in policing  
7 (Schulz, 2019; Strobl 2019; Chu, 2013)  
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13 This is an ambitious programme of works and one that will take some time to gather  
14 support and momentum to administer. To better facilitate this, we encourage women  
15 working in policing across Europe to come together and join forces in advancing their  
16 status. Accounts of early policing suggest that women involved in the work of policing  
17 were interested in each other nationally as well as on a more global level. Indeed,  
18 some of the most wide-ranging and oldest collaborations in policing can be found in a  
19 range of networks promoting women's status. Founded in 1915, the International  
20 Association of Women Police (IAWP) retains a strong contemporary presence acting  
21 as a world-wide forum and network of support and training for both women and men.  
22 At a European level, the development of the European Network of Policewomen  
23 (ENP) in 1989 has acted as an important hub for knowledge and information  
24 exchange, encouraging the formation of national networks for policewomen.  
25 Establishing such coalitions and alliances in the pursuit of equality initiatives are  
26 important for the stimulation of debate and activism; they also offer an important forum  
27 within which individuals can realise their shared experiences. We support these  
28 approaches as essential in improving women's status in policing across Europe.  
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41 In mitigating against the presence of patronage, we encourage a more formalised  
42 system of sponsorship for women police. Whilst the positive power of mentoring is a  
43 well-established feature of supporting women to progress within organisations,  
44 sponsorship is a more systematic attempt to connect women with significant  
45 individuals as well as a formal attempt to plug them into the power structures inherent  
46 in organisational life. Through the development of strong relationships with specific  
47 individuals, Schuck (2019) emphasises the advocacy that can take place as an  
48 outcome, including the: offering of recommendations and information, increased  
49 visibility, the brokering of connections to leaders inside and outside the organization  
50 and the opening up career opportunities.  
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3 Gender equality should be observed in practice at all levels of the police yet currently,  
4 even in the most apparently socially enlightened of countries, fewer than half the  
5 available senior women police make the advance to strategic leadership. It is  
6 important to note that the variation in the gender balance across European policing  
7 systems has much to do with specific historical, social, economic and political contexts  
8 within each jurisdiction. The presence of women and their status may also be an  
9 indicator of both the progressiveness of policing in a country and the general state of  
10 democracy (Brown et al 2014). Schuck (2018:251) also highlights that synergy  
11 between demographics and female representation in the police is important as being  
12 consistent with the principles of democratic societies, i.e. as being both symbolic of  
13 and as active participants in exercising state sanctioned acts of formal social control  
14 “alongside instead of behind men”. Though there is now a wealth of literature that  
15 indicates women’s positive impacts on everyday policing, and whilst we make no  
16 assumption that increasing the number of women in police leadership will  
17 automatically result in ‘improved’ policing, we do, emphasise the importance of  
18 recruiting more women in relation to achieving social justice and legitimacy.  
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32 In presenting the under-researched accounts of European female police leaders in  
33 terms of their experience of stereotyping and prejudice, we have articulated the  
34 informal and formal barriers to advancement of women working in the police in Europe.  
35 We have also examined the literature and identified gaps in the data required to  
36 analyse developments across Europe and have made recommendations to improve  
37 gender equality in police agencies in Europe. The ongoing changes to political,  
38 economic, social, technological and legal environments will undoubtedly continue to  
39 pose considerable opportunities and threats to European police forces over the next  
40 decade or so. It matters significantly to policing that leadership selection systems in  
41 the EU are disadvantaging women. Issues of equality and diversity impact tangibly on  
42 the overall legitimacy of the police service in Europe and elsewhere and matters more  
43 in times of crisis when policing legitimacy is consistently called into question and public  
44 confidence in the police as a public body is low.  
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