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CSSF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

# Women in Policing in Turks and Caicos: Key Barriers and Lessons

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## Abstract

The report provides a summary of the women in policing situation in Turks and Caicos Islands, exploring key risks and barriers, including social and political factors, which inhibit women, including those from vulnerable groups, in their career development and progression within the police. It highlights critical requirements to strengthen women's roles within policing structures and provides brief recommendations focusing on lessons to strengthen gender equality within the police, drawing on analysis presented in the report.

# Introduction

Many CSSF projects aim to improve gender equality within institutions and organisations relevant to peace and security, such as government departments and ministries, militaries and police services. These projects may focus on the position, recruitment, retention and inclusion of women within these organisations, but increasingly also on the attitudes, perceptions and behaviours of men who are or are seen as ‘gate keepers’ to women’s equality, as well as the meaningful role of women in these institutions.

As part of the wider Overseas Territories’ Justice Programme, the CSSF will launch a ‘Women in Policing’ network in Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), the first of its kind in the British Overseas Territories (OT). The CSSF funded a national ‘women in policing’ conference in TCI at the end of May 2022 and, as part of this, the proposed establishment of the ‘women in policing’ network was discussed. The network is intended to be the first step in addressing the significant challenges women in the TCI police face.

This task was commissioned to provide a short analytical report to inform the conference in May. It is based on desk research using publicly accessible material, as well as interviews with a serving UK police officer involved in the TCI project and FCDO staff. The report provides a summary of the women in policing situation in TCI. It outlines key risks and barriers, including social and political factors, that inhibit women, including those from vulnerable groups, in their career development and progression within the police; and critical requirements to strengthen women’s roles within policing structures. It then provides brief recommendations focusing on lessons to strengthen gender equality within the police, drawing on analysis presented in the report.

## Overview of Women in Policing in TCI

Women serve in high-ranking positions throughout TCI, including the previous premier, Sharlene Cartwright-Robinson.<sup>1</sup> Cartwright-Robinson appointed a significant number of women to her cabinet, including the Attorney General, Chief of Justice and senior business leaders; however, this has not extended to the police service. While over 30 per cent of the police service, of approximately 380 personnel, is made up of women officers, their career progression and development are significantly restricted with few making it to inspector level and none making it beyond. Those who are promoted to inspector level are assigned to administrative work and areas such as working on women and children’s issues, which are not seen as ‘men’s work’. As a result, women police officers are currently not being given the same opportunities as their men counterparts and are not part of decision-making and senior management; therefore, the institution fails to attract qualified women recruits as women do not see space for upward mobility in a professional capacity. This is likely to be a significant contributing factor for the TCI police not gaining the same momentum as other public and private sectors, particularly when it comes to women’s representation and participation in policy-making and implementation.

The TCI police initiated a recruitment drive a couple of years ago; however, the Commissioner and the Executive team do not feel that at this stage the women from that cohort have the potential to be promoted to a senior level. Reportedly, there is a five-year plan for the cohort to reach more senior levels, which is a rather disappointing time frame for new recruits and will also impact on embedding a ‘women in police’ network at all levels of the police.<sup>2</sup> TCI women officers who interacted with their UK counterparts shared that while many wanted to have the chance

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<sup>1</sup> Sharlene Cartwright-Robinson served from December 2016 – February 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Online consultation with UK woman police officer.

to pursue interesting opportunities at higher ranks, it was not always about reaching great career heights but also about being heard. This lack of voice and role models has reportedly contributed to a feeling of apathy among women in police in TCI, which comes from a sense of wondering why, as a woman police officer, you would put yourself through this because you cannot see a way of progressing. This then contributes to a degree of acceptance that this is the way things are – because they do not see themselves being promoted to the upper ranks – as opposed to challenging the norms.

There is also a sense that there is a lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure such as accommodation, changing rooms and barracks for women, and a feeling that there is discrimination against women. While this seems to be changing in practice, some of the perceptions remain. The only way to break down these barriers is to have positive role models and consistency in encouraging women within the institution through learning and professional opportunities, and this takes time. At present, however, women continue to experience a lack of support by their executive officers and management, who are all men, and at the same time there is a perception of lack of unity among policewomen themselves.

The Police Commissioner in TCI is committed to diversity and gender equality. There have been exchange visits between TCI and UK police officers, including two TCI officers attending a ‘women and policing’ conference in the UK and two UK police officers providing remote support, as well as a month-long visit in January 2022. While longer-term, deep-rooted change is needed to ensure equal opportunities for career development and progression, establishing a ‘women in policing’ network provides an initial opportunity for women officers to support and mentor each other and discuss ways forward. It is also hoped that the establishment of the TCI network will serve as a pilot for establishing further women in policing networks in the OTs in the longer-term.

With support from two UK police officers, a nascent network has been established, which now has a woman Chair (seconded UK police officer) and a Vice Chair from TCI who was mentored by a UK officer. The Chair is progressing the work but she has competing priorities (she is also Head of the Crime Unit), and therefore does not have the time to develop the network or drive business forward; there is no obvious successor. A Champions Network for ‘Women in Policing’ was established in January 2022 when the team identified a group of women champions who have a letter from the TCI Commissioner recognising their role. There is the understanding that the women champions can promote the network in whatever way they feel comfortable. The conference in May 2022, ‘Women Supporting Women’, was intended to help embed the network further and gain wider support. The network saw an overall growth of 355% following the launch conference as well as an increase in the number of women expressing an interest in being part of the Champions Network.<sup>3</sup>

## Key barriers and risks to women and minority communities

The implications of a male-dominated vocation for female employees have long interested police researchers both within the UK and in police services internationally, as similar barriers to achieving gender equality within policing have repeatedly been identified across different contexts.<sup>4</sup> Within the historical landscape of the Caribbean, law enforcement was adopted during its colonised period and thereby, with the introduction of justice administration

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<sup>3</sup> Debrief Report: RTCIPF WiPN Conference 23rd -24th May 2022, FCDO Overseas Territories Directorate Justice Programme CSSF Funded Project

<sup>4</sup> Butler E., Winfree Jr. L., and Newbold G. (2003), ‘Policing and Gender: Male and Female Perspectives Among Members of the New Zealand Police’, *Police Quarterly*: Vol 6. No. 3, September 2003 298–329 DOI: 10.1177/1098611103254316, Sage Publications <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1027.7276&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

in the Caribbean, a centralised policing structure with colonial archetypes was adopted.<sup>5</sup> This section outlines key barriers and risks that prevent women from accessing equal opportunities within the police. It provides a short analytical overview of the factors that contribute to gender inequality within the police, both institutionally as well as socially.

## Gender inequality within the police

Women police officers are often bypassed by their male counterparts when attempting to carry out various tasks, to receive specialised training, and for upward mobility in their careers.<sup>6</sup> While women have slowly been able to gain entry into some units that traditionally had not recruited female officers, there are still some police organisations in the Caribbean with units that comprise only male officers, and agencies have mentioned lack of gender-sensitive accommodation and facilities as a reason.<sup>7</sup> In many contexts globally, including the Caribbean, recruitment policies often deter women from applying for police jobs because the policies are (or are perceived to be) guided by masculine norms that are valued within the policing sector. At the heart of this is the notion that policing is about ‘crime-fighting’ and that this requires machoism and strength to perform these duties.

Women have seldom been given the responsibility to command operational squads in the Caribbean. Many policewomen would agree that they are usually directed by their shift supervisor or other senior administrator to perform either station security duties or clerical tasks while their male counterparts are assigned to carry out mobile and foot patrol duties or even field investigations.<sup>8</sup> Promotions are usually based on length of service in the police force rather than on performance or a merit-based ranking. There is a lack of transparency, but a strong suspicion, that a pay gap exists between women and men. Although there is no clear evidence, this discourages women from wanting to pursue opportunities within the police, because they do not perceive there are any incentives or equal opportunities to job satisfaction and fairness in treatment.

Furthermore, according to a 2017 Code of Ethics,<sup>9</sup> key principles outlined for the TCI police force do not even explicitly include gender equality. While no human resource policies or documents were made available for this task, the lack of transparency around the pay scale for women and men police officers was raised during a key informant interview as an issue feeding into the narrative of fewer opportunities for career progression for women within the police.<sup>10</sup> In addition, lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure, such as accommodation, toilets, trainings, grievance mechanisms, child day-care and policies, including maternity and paternity policies, can all contribute to increased barriers for women in taking up policing as a profession or continuing with the job. This is especially so when more gender specific roles (such as childcare) are included in a woman’s life, as she is expected to take up caregiver roles by the society.

## Workplace misogyny for women police

Policewomen are severely under-represented in policing globally.<sup>11</sup> But with a population of approximately 49,000 and police service of around 225 personnel, the TCI’s 37 per cent women police officers and support staff are

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<sup>5</sup> Karen Lancaster-Ellis (2013) ‘Personal Perspectives: Challenges for Women in Policing within the Caribbean’, *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*: Volume 5, No.1, Jan-Jun,2013: pp. 21–36.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force (2017), Code of Ethics, <http://www.tcipolice.tc/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Royal-Turks-and-Caicos-Police-Force-Code-of-Ethics-June-2017.pdf>, College of Policing Limited

<sup>10</sup> Online consultation with UK woman police officer.

<sup>11</sup> Strobl S. (2020), ‘Towards a ‘Women-Oriented’ Approach to Post-Conflict Policing: Interpreting National Experience(s) and Intergovernmental Aspirations’, *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 9(1): 95-111. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v9i1.1465>

considerably more than other contexts in the region.<sup>12</sup> In some countries, policewomen are only permitted to work in gender-segregated units (e.g., Kuwait and parts of India), while in other countries, there is full integration and a strong culture of women's inclusion that has been deliberately cultivated by police leadership and national policies (e.g., Israel, Norway).<sup>13</sup> Building women's participation can be challenging, and short-term gains can prove effective as stepping stones, such as segregated units for women officers, non-combative roles and units focusing solely on women and children (as evidenced in some South Asian countries). However, it does not necessarily challenge deep-rooted patriarchal mind sets within the institution and in society and can often maintain the status quo of requiring masculine traits to 'combat crime' or 'provide security'.

The most persistent complaints are that a chivalrous attitude among supervisory staff has led to discriminatory practices in the deployment of women officers, that women have been unfairly disadvantaged in promotional competitions, and that a macho culture within the police creates a difficult work environment for women and this becomes worse when sexual harassment occurs.<sup>14</sup> While many opportunities, particularly in terms of training and promotion, are available for all police officers in the Caribbean, there are still high and unacceptable levels of inequity and bias against female police officers.<sup>15</sup>

Although some of the challenges experienced by women in the Caribbean region are unique to a particular role or rank, others are generic and experienced at every rank. These include difficulties in balancing work and family life, sexual harassment, lack of support for policewomen to carry out their jobs or participate in training and on-the-job learning opportunities, and gender discrimination in pay and promotion.<sup>16</sup> Sexual harassment within the workplace, in the police throughout the Caribbean region, is prevalent. Allegations that women have been promoted as a result of having sexual relations with senior men officers in exchange for job promotion are common, which contribute to an imbalance of power relations and leave women open to further harassment.<sup>17</sup> If senior officers within a professional setting are using their power to seek out sexual relations in exchange for rewards and/or promotion, it constitutes sexual exploitation. There is also speculation that often women do not report cases of sexual harassment for fear of backlash against them by men colleagues, both senior and peers.<sup>18</sup> While TCI-specific literature was not available on this issue, from other contexts it is clear that sexual exploitation and harassment is likely to be prevalent in TCI too. Sexual exploitation and harassment within a police service is extremely detrimental to achieving gender equality within the police and seriously damages policing approaches and values as well as the reputation of the police service and its ability to recruit women.

## Perceptions of policing and its role in society

Public perceptions of policing within TCI helps unpack how people perceive the police, which includes gendered ideas of how women and men would police. Within patriarchal contexts, the police service is seen as a male-dominated profession that require attributes often associated with men, such as chivalry, courage, honour and machismo, thought to be useful policing traits.

For instance, research showed that contemporary policing programmes, including community policing, may best be served by two types of officers: first, the perceived female role of social-services officer acting as the nurturer or

<sup>12</sup> Data sourced from Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force's official Facebook page, uploaded 20 March 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Butler E., Winfree Jr. L., and Newbold G. (2003), "Policing and Gender: Male and Female Perspectives Among Members of the New Zealand Police", *Police Quarterly*: Vol 6. No. 3, September 2003 298–329 DOI: 10.1177/1098611103254316, Sage Publications. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1027.7276&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Karen Lancaster-Ellis (2013) "Personal Perspectives: Challenges for Women in Policing within the Caribbean", *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*: Volume 5, No.1, Jan-Jun, 2013: pp. 21–36.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Online consultation with UK woman police officer.

<sup>18</sup> Karen Lancaster-Ellis (2013) "Personal Perspectives: Challenges for Women in Policing within the Caribbean", *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*: Volume 5, No.1, Jan-Jun, 2013: pp. 21–36.

even social worker; second, the perceived male role of being more physically challenging and a professional law enforcement officer or crime fighter.<sup>19</sup> Because most police departments are male-dominated work environments, most police officers, when surveyed, view themselves as crime fighters.<sup>20</sup> This has been changing over the last few decades in most contexts including the Caribbean as the policing approach is adapting and evolving ways in which to address crime, insecurity and violence, while directly engaging with the public to maintain rule of law and encourage social harmony. This has required adopting a more people-centred approach to policing that requires public trust, police–community relationships and inclusivity within police personnel.

An unreliable and non-inclusive policing approach can often lack public trust in its ability to deliver and is usually characterised by levels of corruption, impunity and lack of gender-responsive strategies, which includes having less women in the force and being prone to sustained use of interrogative and extra-judicial tactics. Increasing the number of women in policing involves a greater likelihood of cultural change, towards adopting community policing within the framework of democracy and developing democracies.<sup>21</sup> A women-oriented approach to policing begins when police leaders recognise that women are a key component of operational effectiveness in democratic contexts that involve service-oriented policing, rather than policing that is merely an apparatus for use in defence of the state.<sup>22</sup>

## Gendered implications for women as a result of patriarchy

Caribbean societies value motherhood and place a strong emphasis on being a ‘good mother’, which includes mothers providing care and nurturing responsibilities and representing a strong role model for female and male children.<sup>23</sup> Alongside this, women within the Caribbean region have also historically been involved in economic productivity, stemming from slavery and colonial rule that required them to be a part of the workforce.<sup>24</sup> Women as wives and mothers are often responsible for taking care of household chores, and this gets passed down to other female roles, such as to daughters, sisters and girlfriends.<sup>25</sup> Mothers are both the main source of emotional support as well as punishment and behaviour correction for their sons.<sup>26</sup> And, while this can present an opportunity for women to access increased upward sociocultural mobility, it is also a strong signifier of a patriarchal conditioning that places women’s contribution in the family as a cultural value that is expected of them, shaping perceptions of women as nurturers and, therefore, soft and tolerant.

Whilst it is changing, women being perceived as ‘soft’ and ‘emotional’ often equates to reduced opportunities within male-dominant professions, such as the police, the military and in aviation as pilots. Up until the late-1990s and 2000s, it was suggested that increasing the presence of women officers has the potential to temper policing styles by introducing a “softer” element into the job.<sup>27</sup> While this notion initially created opportunities to increase women’s representation in the police, literature also suggests that policing continues to be male-dominated.

<sup>19</sup> Butler E., Winfree Jr. L., and Newbold G. (2003), ‘Policing and Gender: Male and Female Perspectives Among Members of the New Zealand Police’, *Police Quarterly*: Vol 6. No. 3, September 2003 298–329 DOI: 10.1177/1098611103254316, Sage Publications <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1027.7276&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Strobl S. (2020), ‘Towards a ‘Women-Oriented’ Approach to Post-Conflict Policing: Interpreting National Experience(s) and Intergovernmental Aspirations’, *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 9(1): 95–111. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcsd.v9i1.1465>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Sharla Blank (2013), ‘An Historical and Contemporary Overview of Gendered Caribbean Relations’, *Journal of Arts and Humanities (JAH)*, Volume -2, No.-4, May, 2013

<sup>24</sup> Flavin M. and Bennett R. (2001), ‘Police Work and Gender in the Caribbean: The influence of gender and nation’, *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management* Vol. 24,1, pp 56 – 87.

<sup>25</sup> Sharla Blank (2013), ‘An Historical and Contemporary Overview of Gendered Caribbean Relations’, *Journal of Arts and Humanities (JAH)*, Volume -2, No.-4, May, 2013

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Butler E., Winfree Jr. L., and Newbold G. (2003), ‘Policing and Gender: Male and Female Perspectives Among Members of the New Zealand Police’, *Police Quarterly*: Vol 6. No. 3, September 2003 298–329 DOI: 10.1177/1098611103254316, Sage Publications <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1027.7276&rep=rep1&type=pdf>



“Contemporary research continues to note this overwhelming characteristic of the law enforcement profession, despite the ebb and flow of gender social relations in other professions and in societies over time.”<sup>28</sup> Being a woman in policing carries ‘negative symbolic capital’, as hegemonic masculinity acts as a barrier to women’s participation and advancement in the field.<sup>29</sup> Strong patriarchal values and masculine norms create intrinsic barriers inhibiting women from taking up policing as a profession. This could be in terms of: reduced social acceptance of women in those roles; social expectations/obligations of women within homes, irrespective of employment and income status; and perceptions of women being unable to ‘fight crime’.

## Lack of gender-related data and role models for women in the police

Lack of data stunts the design of inclusive policies, particularly if the indicators that underpin those policies rely on symbolic representation. According to UN Women statistics,<sup>30</sup> 93.3 per cent of data on gender gaps and country performance is missing for TCI, which is higher than the average region score of 60.7 per cent. Gaps in gender data include data on violence against women, unpaid care and domestic work, key labour market indicators such as unemployment rates, and gender pay gaps.<sup>31</sup> In addition, areas such as gender and poverty, physical and sexual harassment lack comparable methodologies for regular monitoring.<sup>32</sup> While women’s representation in senior-most positions cannot be overlooked in TCI,<sup>33</sup> holistic data on gender gaps are critical to shed light on inclusive outcomes for social, political and economic progress. Not acknowledging existing inequality gaps while designing policies can be problematic as they then fail to address the needs and concerns of women police officers, which also impacts on the nature and way police services are delivered to the wider population. There is also a need to apply intersectional factors, such as age, geographic location, education, income, language and other class-based indicators, when applying gender and inequality frameworks.

During a consultation with UK women police officers, a lack of role models as a key barrier for women’s upward mobility within the institution was highlighted. Despite reports of women moving up within the public and private sectors,<sup>34</sup> within the TCI police service, women continue to face obstacles in accessing opportunities for upward mobility. Currently, the senior-most position occupied by a policewoman is Inspector level, and the overall number is significantly lower compared to TCI policemen.<sup>35</sup> As highlighted above, women are passed over for promotions within the Caribbean region including in TCI, and there is a perception that policewomen have to put in more hours and effort in order to be acknowledged alongside their male counterparts as upward mobility within the police favours men more than women.

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<sup>28</sup> Strobl S. (2020), ‘Towards a ‘Women-Oriented’ Approach to Post-Conflict Policing: Interpreting National Experience(s) and Intergovernmental Aspirations’, *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 9(1): 95-111. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcsd.v9i1.1465>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> <https://data.unwomen.org/country/turks-and-caicos-islands>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> BBC (2017), ‘Turks and Caicos: Where women hold the top jobs’, 29 January 2017, retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-38679913>

<sup>34</sup> BBC (2017), ‘Turks and Caicos: Where women hold the top jobs’, 29 January 2017, retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-38679913>

<sup>35</sup> Online consultation with UK woman police officer.

# Critical requirements to strengthen women's roles within policing structures

*"There is a perception held by many women police officers that they are now required to work twice as hard [sic] than their male counterparts if they are to receive any deserving recognition, opportunity, or career advancement."<sup>36</sup>*

Strengthening women's roles within policing structures is a complex challenge as it necessarily goes beyond recruiting women in to the police service and looks at their experiences, opportunities and career progression once they are in the police. This section outlines some issues that need to be considered in order to support women officers in their roles.

## Structural change is key

The lack of upward mobility for women police officers to move through the ranks has been identified as an issue in a wide range of contexts and countries around the world, from the US to New Zealand to Montenegro to TCI.<sup>37</sup> Given that policing should reflect the values of the society it serves, women police officers should have the same professional opportunities as men. In order to ensure this is the case, there is a need to focus on the structures and systems in place to bring about a shift in culture and attitude across the police and community.

While police departments are by nature hierarchical, their structure can reinforce gender inequality and maintenance of the status quo and concentrate power in the hands of the elite. For example, in English-speaking countries in the Caribbean, Police Commissioners across the region owe their appointment, directly or indirectly, to the political directorate in the person of the Prime Minister/President. There is little incentive to reform a structure through which those in power have access to a force wholly in its control and designed to suppress opponents and dissent with a heavy hand.<sup>38</sup> Understanding how current policies and procedures are or are not gender inclusive and gender equal is an important first step in establishing what structural changes might be needed. One way to do this is by carrying out a gender assessment or audit, followed by gender training and gender transformative work with all serving police officers – women and men across all roles and ranks.

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<sup>36</sup> Lancaster-Ellis, Karen "Personal Perspectives: Challenges for Women in Policing within the Caribbean" *Pakistan Journal of Criminology* Volume 5, No.1, Jan-Jun, 2013, pp. 28

<sup>37</sup> Poleski, Kristin, "To Promote or Not to Promote: An Inquiry into the Experiences of Female Police Officers and their Decisions to Pursue Promotion" (2016) <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/1603> and Increasing and Supporting the Participation of Women at all Levels in the Montenegrin Police, pp13, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/3/480853.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Gomes, Carolyn, *Police Accountability in the Caribbean: Where are the People?*, Jamaicans for Justice, 2007, [https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/intl/docs/police\\_accountability\\_paper\\_gomes.pdf](https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/intl/docs/police_accountability_paper_gomes.pdf)

GENDER ASSESSMENTS AND AUDITS<sup>39</sup>

Gender assessments and audits can help police services to evaluate how gender equitable their own internal organisational structures, policies and processes are, and/or how gender responsive their policing operations are.

An assessment/ audit might involve the following components:

- Staff survey to determine understanding, attitudes, behaviours and practices related to gender.
- Focus group discussions with different staff groups (men, women, LGBTI groups, different ranks or departments, roles and responsibilities). Discussions focus on gaining a deeper understanding of trends that emerge from the staff survey.
- Review of organisational policies and procedures through a gendered lens, asking whether women and men, including those who are LGBTI, are considered and are affected differently.
- A financial audit, reviewing salaries by sex disaggregation to see if women and men are equitably compensated, and reviewing departmental budgets to see how resources are allocated (for instance, for women's desks and gender units vis-à-vis other departments).
- On the basis of this research, the assessment/ audit team (which can be either internal or external) drafts a report setting out the findings and pointing to areas for improvement. The report can serve as a baseline for future assessments/ audits, helping police services to determine whether they are making progress.

Another concrete step that can be taken is to develop an internal policy document focusing on gender equality and equal treatment. This can be a short, precise document describing key instructions and values regarding gender equality and equal treatment within the police. This document needs to be well known and understood by all police officers and strongly communicated by the Police Director and all police managers and accompanied by trainings and short courses for men and women officers, across roles and ranks. The Swedish Police Authority's Equal Treatment Strategy 2017 – 2021 is a good example of how such an initiative can be developed and embedded.<sup>40</sup> An examination of operating procedures, legislative framework, and wider internal policies is also necessary if women officers are to be in a position to play a greater role in the transformation of their police agencies and further their careers.

## Promotion on merit rather than length of service and seniority

Possibly one of the most important ways of enabling women to achieve career progression within a police service is to ensure that the promotion system is based on merit rather than seniority based on long service. Policing has, traditionally, been a male preserve in many countries, and while there have been recruitment drives to bring more women into the police service and/or to meet quotas that have been set, women police officers often end up in the lower ranks with limited potential for promotion. In Estonia, a significant recruitment drive led to the number of women in the police force increasing from 22.4 per cent in 1998 to 33.33 per cent in 2006, which is progress in terms of numbers but still not reflective of the population. In addition, despite the increase in the proportion of women officers, only 15 per cent of women were in higher-ranking positions and of these over 80 per cent were

<sup>39</sup> Adapted from DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women (2019) "Policing and Gender", in Gender and Security Toolkit. Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women pp 24, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/9/442519.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Increasing and Supporting the Participation of Women at all Levels in the Montenegrin Police, Annex 5, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/3/480853.pdf>

employed as commissaries, which is the lowest level at this rank.<sup>41</sup> In TCI, the recent recruitment drive has also not resulted in an increase of women officers being promoted to senior ranks.<sup>42</sup>

It is not enough to recruit women into the police; it is essential that they are given the same opportunities (roles and responsibilities and pay) and skills and career development support as their male counterparts once they are there. In order to do this, the criterion for promotion must be made clear and transparent and any recruitment opportunities advertised for fair competition and encouraging women to apply. This will help give women an equal chance to go for jobs and see what their career path might look like. It will also help dispel rumours that, if they are promoted, it was done because they were having sexual relations with a senior officer, sadly allegations that women face all over the world, including in the UK. Opportunities for women to undertake professional skills training should also be explored as a way to upskill police and improve their confidence, often a key factor in women saying why they do not apply for promotion. In Liberia, the United States International Development Law Organization collaborated with the Liberia National Police to provide a scholarship fund for female police officers to undertake professional skills training, as part of broader efforts to increase access to justice for Liberians and to advance their police role and/or career goals.<sup>43</sup>

It is also important to assess the criteria and assessment processes used for promotion. Research in Kenya showed that an emphasis on physical strength for promotion combined with performance based on male standards presented severe challenges for women and hampered their promotion prospects.<sup>44</sup> This is linked to the section below about reassessing how skills are valued and regarding promotion based on merit.

## Reassessing which skills are valued: Shifting perceptions

*“Policewomen more often defuse and de-escalate and generally possess more effective communication skills, which results in more easily earning the cooperation and trust required to police a community.”<sup>45</sup>*

While men have the advantage of generally being physically stronger than their women counterparts, there is also widespread recognition that women bring other valuable skills to policing work and that these can in fact lead to a style of policing that is more focused on defusing and de-escalating a situation. A study in Montenegro highlighted how police managers recognised that women “perform better than men in difficult communications, gathering and analysis of intelligence and investigation of cases of domestic violence, youth and sex crime and trafficking in human beings”.<sup>46</sup> Research in the US shows how women have been found to have proportionally fewer use-of-force incidents and citizen complaints and, as a result, potentially save their departments from expensive lawsuits – saving departments from costly lawsuits.<sup>47</sup> However, it is important not to essentialise women by assuming they all possess these traits and, indeed, they are often used to reinforce stereotypes of women’s nurturing role, leading them to be assigned to ‘women’s jobs’.

<sup>41</sup> Resetnikova, A., Women in Policing in a Transforming Organization: The Case of the Estonian Police, The Journal of Power Institutions in Post Soviet Societies, Issue 4/5, 2006, p. 6 [www.ipss.revues.org/pdf/502](http://www.ipss.revues.org/pdf/502)

<sup>42</sup> Interview with UK women police officer.

<sup>43</sup> Press Release - Launch of Fund for Liberia National Police Professional Development Fund Class of 2016/2017: Launch of Fund for Liberian Female Police Officers, <https://www.idlo.int/news/highlights/professional-development-liberian-female-police-officers>

<sup>44</sup> Resila A Onyango, M. Natarajan, Gender equity approach to policing in Kenya: Lessons, challenges and prospects (2021) International Journal of Police Science & Management

<sup>45</sup> Bastick M (2008) Integrating gender in post-conflict security sector reform. In Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook, 2008: 149–171. Geneva: Democratic Control of the Armed Forces

<sup>46</sup> Increasing and Supporting the Participation of Women at all Levels in the Montenegrin Police, pp13, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/3/480853.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice Special Report, “Women in Policing; Breaking Barriers and Blazing a Path” July 2019, pp1 <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/252963.pdf>

Even though there continue to be entrenched gender stereotypes in many police services around the world, it is important to recognise and value the skills and strengths women bring, and that simply being stronger in no way makes somebody a better police officer. It is vital that this is acknowledged and that career development and promotion is based on the full range of skills a police officer brings rather than an unequal weighting being given to physical strength, reinforcing entrenched gender stereotypes. Following this route leads to women being assigned to tasks that are not seen as 'men's work', such as safeguarding, victim assistance and crime prevention roles, which fail to maximise the potential of their diverse talents and skill.

## Role models

*"You can't be what you don't see."<sup>48</sup>*

A significant barrier for women entering and remaining in the police force is the lack of positive role models. It is hard to imagine reaching senior ranks if you do not see anyone ahead of you in those positions. A senior UK police officer in the Metropolitan Police pointed out that "young aspiring women police officers need to be able to look up and see women performing senior/leadership roles and know that they too can achieve promotion to these positions."<sup>49</sup> Seeing women police officers actively involved in policing can also challenge wider misconceptions about what women can and cannot do.<sup>50</sup>

The promotion of women to senior ranks is therefore important not only for the individual themselves but also to inspire others to follow them and show that it is possible. If women believe that they are going to have to fight their way to the top amidst harassment and discrimination, then they simply will not seek career progression. In the Bahamas, the Royal Bahamas Police Force is currently under the command of the force's first female acting Commissioner of Police, Loretta Mackey, who not only serves as a role model but has also committed to empowering women officers and helping them to recognise their potential.<sup>51</sup>

"When the local women see the female peacekeepers, they get inspired by them. They see [women] can perform the same role as male counterparts," Colonel Madhubala Bala, one of the contingent's commanders said. "They've served as role models for the local [women] and girls, and the effect on Liberian women was very significant"<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Lucy D'Orsi, Deputy Assistant Commissioner for the Met Police at the Security Women Conference at the Guildhall in London in 2019 quoted in 'Be a Force for All' Recruitment Campaign: the questions we should be asking. <https://www.securitywomen.org/post/be-a-force-for-all-recruitment-campaign-the-questions-we-should-be-asking>

<sup>50</sup> Deans, C. (2019). Gender Inequality: The Struggle Female Police Officers Face in the Masculine Culture of Policing

<sup>51</sup> The Nassau Guardian, Women in Policing (Nov 24, 2021) <https://thenassauguardian.com/women-in-policing>

<sup>52</sup> The Story of UNMIL (2018) [https://unmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/the\\_story\\_of\\_unmil\\_0.pdf](https://unmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/the_story_of_unmil_0.pdf)

### WOMEN'S POLICE CONTINGENT: ROLE MODELS FOR A DECADE - INDIA'S ALL-FEMALE POLICE UNIT IN LIBERIA<sup>53</sup>

In 2007, United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) deployed the first all-female police unit (FPU) from India and, with annual rotations, they continued to serve the Mission for 10 years, providing critical policing support as well as acting as role models for Liberia. During their deployments in Liberia, the women's police unit was to provide static, visible security outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They also conducted joint patrols with the Liberia National Police (LNP), security escort duties, and they assisted in developing the public order capacity of the LNP. Due to their dedication, professionalism and motivation, the FPUs were strong, visible role models, gaining world-wide attention and illustrating the significant contribution that women can make towards the provision of security. Liberian women were watching: In 2016, women made up 17 per cent of the country's security sector, as compared to 6 per cent before the arrival of the Indian contingent.

United Nations, [The Story of UNMIL](#), Final report

## Sustainable networks and support

Initiatives to support women in policing, including establishing women in policing networks or associations or encouraging women police to join the International Association of Women Police (or national equivalent associations), when effective, can play a major role in helping to co-ordinate and empower women in the police and as members of their communities and societies. They can also be mobilised to advocate for policy changes that benefit their members and other colleagues. For example, the Bahamian Women's Police Association succeeded in getting a maternity and paternity leave policy introduced into the Royal Bahamas Police Force and, in Ghana, domestic violence has been established as a crime after the Ghana Police Ladies Association members took on roles related to domestic violence investigation and victim service in the police service.<sup>54</sup> Work by women's police associations has impacted on policies and practices ranging from recruitment to flexible working hours to national policies relating to women's rights.<sup>55</sup>

Women's police associations and networks also serve a key role in providing mentoring and support to members. In interviews in the US, police women noted how mentoring had been one of the most influential factors in their careers and a way to help them navigate and be successful in an adversarial system. In a sector where the 'old boys club' reigns, the importance of women mentoring and supporting each other cannot be underestimated. "When women take an interest and mentor each other and support each other, particularly women of rank, they need to help the women behind them",<sup>56</sup> rather than draw up the ladder behind them as is often perceived to happen.<sup>57</sup>

While networks and associations and the benefits they can bring offer positive progress for women within police structures, the longevity of these initiatives, and therefore their potential, is sometimes limited. For example, in 2012, Kenya set up an association of women police officers to promote their role in law enforcement and security sector reform; yet, by 2016, the association was no longer active. Similarly, a Caribbean Association of Women

<sup>53</sup> The Story of UNMIL (2018) [https://unmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/the\\_story\\_of\\_unmil\\_0.pdf](https://unmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/the_story_of_unmil_0.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> Montgomery, R, Female Staff Associations in the Security Sector: Agents of Change? Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) Occasional Paper - No 25, 2011, <https://www.dcaf.ch/female-staff-associations-security-sector-agents-change>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp 15-17 outlines all the police associations researched in the study and their functions.

<sup>56</sup> Women Police: The official publication of the International Association of Women Police, May – July 2020, pp25 <https://www.iawp.org/resources/May-July,%202020.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Astley, J and Harness, T, Career progression within police service: Dispelling the myth about the thin blue ceiling? (2009) <https://www.ufhrd.co.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/6-12-refereed-paper.pdf>

Police was established in 2006 but has been inactive since a conference in Trinidad and Tobago in 2007.<sup>58</sup> There is no available material showing why these associations are no longer active, but it is important to note that to assure success associations and networks must be embedded in a wider framework of policies and practices aimed at enhancing gender reform efforts.

## Key lessons on strengthening gender equality within police institutions

The analysis above has outlined some of the key requirements necessary to strengthen women's roles within police structures, as well as some key risks and barriers women face in their roles and responsibilities, career development and progression. This section draws on those findings to summarise some key lessons to inform future thinking and progress in TCI and other OTs.

- A. Prioritise increasing women's representation at all levels of the police through revised recruitment and human resources policies:** At present, there are insufficient women at the executive level of the police as most policewomen are in the junior ranks and not part of decision-making. While increasing the proportion of women police is not a solution in itself (efforts need to be made to ensure women are also taking on meaningful roles, including in decision-making), it is a step towards addressing and balancing out a traditionally patriarchal sector. Representation of women in senior positions within police can be helpful to pave the way for other women and to act as role models. However, undertaking a gender assessment of existing recruitment policy and other HR and institutional policies within the police is the only real way to assess gaps and opportunities to increase women in the police workforce and identify how to further their career development and promotion. Attention should be paid to criteria used for recruitment and promotion as well as an assessment of the values and attributes need to police effectively beyond simply valuing physical strength.
- B. Put in place gender-responsive policies and referral processes for bullying/harassment:** The prevalence of harassment faced by policewomen, misogyny within the police and perceptions of women being passed over for promotion in favour of their male counterparts is entrenched and contributes to ongoing detrimental impacts on women police both from a personal and professional perspective. Initiating a review of existing human resource policies and grievance mechanisms to report against bullying and harassment and abuse of authority can help prevent and address misogynistic attitudes, behaviours and any form of harassment within the police. Ensuring there are clear and transparent referral processes and that a complainant is protected (and guaranteed anonymity/confidentiality where needed) is essential too if the working environment for women police is to improve.
- C. Ensure gender-sensitive infrastructure is put in place:** Ensuring gender-sensitive facilities and infrastructure ensures women a safe workplace and fosters respect within the police by prioritising the concerns of women police officers. Workplace harassment and sexual harassment within the police are said to be prevalent within the Caribbean region, including in the TCI police and, while having gender-sensitive infrastructures will not automatically contribute to alleviating this problem, they can help to reduce it by creating a safe space for women police and enabling them to share their concerns and priorities. It will also help alleviate any concerns from a woman's family that she does not have appropriate facilities. Aside from

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<sup>58</sup> Inventory of Female Staff Associations Reviewed for the Occasional Paper Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) Occasional Paper - No 25 "Female Staff Associations in the Security Sector: Agents of Change?" (2011) <https://wiisglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Female-Staff-Associations-Annex-2011.pdf>

provisions to have separate accommodation, toilet facilities and separate changing rooms for women and men, this would also include provisions for child day care and initiate institutional reform based on a gendered needs assessment. If the police want to increase women's representation, they would need to demonstrate that they are able to take more women recruits by investing in gender-sensitive infrastructure.

- D. **Embed mentoring and support processes:** The lack of role models for women police around the world, including in the TCI Police, and particularly in senior police positions, is a key concern. As policing necessarily evolves and increasingly relies on technology and other advancements, the need for talented recruits and/or the retention of existing women officers is really important. Encouraging an accountable and democratic policing approach that adopts contemporary policing models and relies more on community and public interface could encourage more women and people from diverse groups to apply as ownership and trust towards police increases. It is also important to take into account that women are not a homogenous group and intersectional factors such as age, education, class and language can play a role in who can access and fulfil job criteria and who are left behind as a result of marginalised patterns. The 1:1 mentoring that has been provided by UK officers to TCI police women is a good start and should be continued. Connecting women through networks or association within a country but also more widely can offer the support and encouragement needed to pursue desired career objectives, regardless of whether this involves promotion or not.
- E. **Individual job satisfaction:** Gender equality within the police is important for two key reasons: first, it fosters mutual respect between women and men police officers and addresses any form of harassment based on hierarchies or centralised command structures; and, second, it ensures women's rights to equal opportunities for all genders, linked to higher job satisfaction. Women are often overshadowed when it comes to promotions, trainings and interesting learning opportunities. Providing incentives through performance-based reward schemes can pave the way for increased social prestige and acceptance for women police officers, as well as set examples for new women police recruits.
- F. **Engaging men as well as women:** For progress to be made towards gender equality, better career development, and progression for women in the police, it is essential that men are involved in the discussion too. "Men are important change agents in policing, and they will be integral to bringing about an essential shift in policing culture."<sup>59</sup> Working with men in the police to change their attitudes and behaviour and transform them will not only change the culture within the police but also help to address the wider public's harmful gender norms and assumption. By doing this, there will be increased opportunities for women police and improved security for women and girls.

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<sup>59</sup> US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute.