

Violence against women and the girl child

Women in the police



Key points

- Women still account for a small percentage of police officers. Between 2004 and 2017, the share of women police officers worldwide increased from 10.1% to 12.9%.
- The largest percentage of women police officers in 2017 was reported in Australia and New Zealand (31.5%); in countries in the Northern Africa and Western Asia region the reported percentage was the lowest (4.1%).

Background

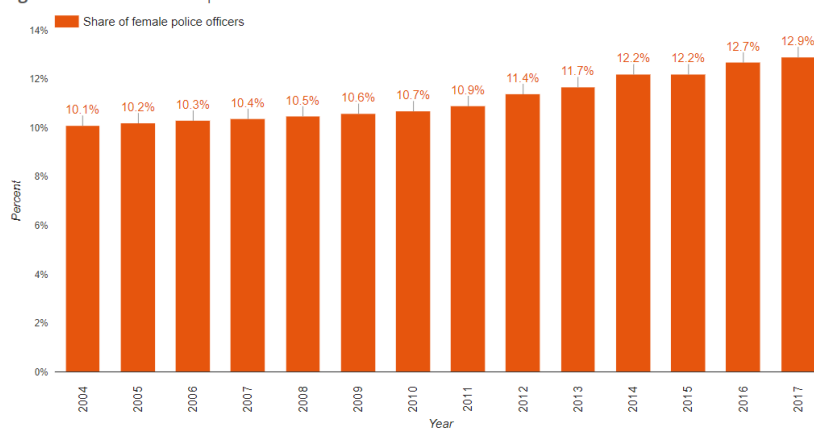
Women play a vital role in policing and contribute, as much as their male colleagues, to providing safe and inclusive communities. Female police officers act as role models for gender equality, inspiring women and girls to advocate for their own rights and to pursue careers in law enforcement. Moreover, female police officers provide a greater sense of security to women and children and improve access and support from law enforcement agencies to all members of the community.

Women police officers utilize a style of policing that relies less on physical force, are better at defusing potentially violent confrontations, are less likely to become involved in the use of excessive force and are more likely to respond effectively to violence against women.¹

Current situation

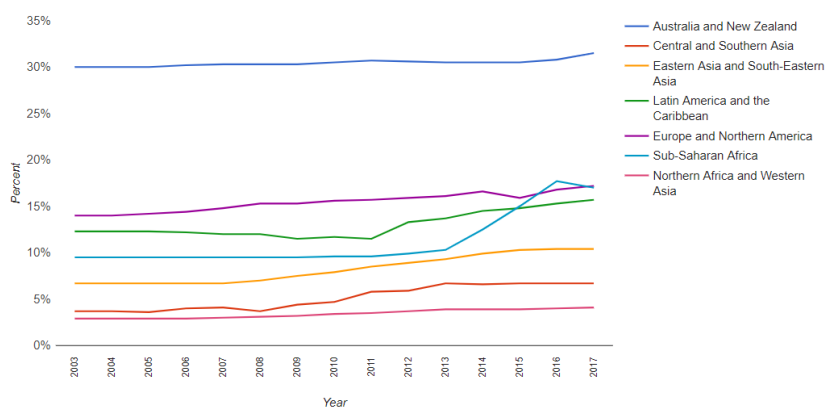
There has been a slow evolution in the gender composition of police forces around the world towards the inclusion of female officers: globally the share of women police officers increased from 10.1% in 2004 to 12.9% in 2017 (see figure I).

Figure I Share of women police officers: 2004 to 2017



Source: Data provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (correspondence on 21 May 2020)

Since the beginning of the century, the percentage of women police officers has increased globally (see figure II). In 2017, the largest percentage of women police officers was reported in Australia and New Zealand (31.5%), followed by countries in the Europe and North America (17.2%), Latin America and the Caribbean (15.7%), Sub-Saharan Africa (17.0%), Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (10.4%), Central and Southern Asia (6.7%) and Northern Africa and Western Asia regions (4.1%).

Figure II Share of women police officers by region: 2004 to 2017

Source: Data provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (correspondence on 21 May 2020).

Based on the latest available data, in 2017 in five European countries the share of women police officer was greater than 30% (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Sweden). Although the proportion of women police officers in those countries is higher than in other countries, there are still challenges in ensuring that women are represented at higher levels of management. The Nordic-Baltic Network of Policewomen continues to ask the question: why are women underrepresented in the top and middle management positions and in operational positions in the police force?²

The United Nations Department of Safety and Security has made increased efforts to mainstream gender into its policies and programmes, working with the partners of the Inter-Agency Security Management Network to develop and improve gender sensitivity and responsiveness in all aspects of the United Nations Security Management System and its security risk management processes.³

As a result of these efforts, the number of female police officers deployed with the United Nations increased from about 900 (7% of 12,000 police) in 2009 to 1,300 officers (10% of 13,000) in 2016. More needs to be done, however, to address the gender imbalance, as reaffirmed by the Security Council in its resolution 2242 (2015), in which it mandated that the Organization double the numbers of women in military and police contingents of United Nations peacekeeping operations by 2020.⁴

About the data

Coverage

Female police officers worldwide.

Availability

Trend data on police personnel by sex are available for 98 countries, covering over half of the world's population. The capacity of countries to supply such data is generally considered adequate.

Oceania (excl) refers to Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand throughout the publication.

Definition

- Proportion of women among police personnel. Police personnel comprise workers in public agencies whose principal functions are the prevention, detection and investigation of crime and the apprehension of alleged offenders.

Sources

- [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime database.](#)
- [United United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(UNDESA\), Statistical Division, Minimum Set of Gender Indicators.](#)
- [United Inclusive Security, "Breaking the Brass Ceiling: Policewomen Around the World", 2014.](#)
- [United Nations Police, UN Police Gender Initiatives.](#)
- [Nordic-Baltic Network of Policewomen, website.](#)

Footnotes

1. According to the [National Center for Women & Policing](#) (a Division of the Feminist Majority Foundation, Los Angeles, United States of America).
2. [Nordic Council of Ministers, "Women in the Police – Changes and Challenges", Nordic-Baltic Seminiar, 31 May–6 June 2017, Riga.](#)
3. [United Nations Department of Safety and Security, "Gender & Security"](#) .
4. [United United Nations Police, "Police Gender Initiatives"](#) .