



**POLITI**

**The Female Factor**  
Gender balance in law enforcement

# The Female Factor

## Gender balance in law enforcement

*The key to a successful future for any organisation lies in its ability to attract, develop and retain the best talent. With half of the world's population being women, educating, empowering and recognising their talent is fundamental to succeeding in a rapidly-changing world.*

Equality between women and men is one of the European Union's founding values, going back to 1957 when the principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the Treaty of Rome. Since then, the EU's achievements in fostering equality between the sexes have helped to improve the lives of many European citizens. Encouraging trends include the increased number of women in the labour market and their progress in securing better training and education. However, gender gaps remain and, across the EU, women are still largely outnumbered by men in positions of responsibility in all fields. On average, women make up half of the workforce but less than 20% of senior roles.<sup>1</sup>

In 2010, the European Commission adopted the Women's Charter,<sup>2</sup> renewing its commitment to gender equality and to strengthening the gender perspective in all its policies. In 2012, Europol launched its own gender-balance project to explore why the imbalance exists in its staff, particularly at management level. 35% of Europol's staff are female but just 0.5% of those are in middle or senior management, translating into just one post. The project aims to improve this gender imbalance, raise awareness on gender equality and develop an approach to ensure that gender equality becomes an integral part of Europol's working environment.

As part of its gender-balance project, Europol interviewed delegates at the European Police Chiefs Convention in The Hague. One fundamental question we asked was: why are there so few women at a senior level in law enforcement compared to other professions?





"Because of the assumption that, in order to work in the police, physical strength is needed," says Sonia Alfano, MEP. "This is an extraordinary mistake especially because, in policing, intelligence is the most important factor to lead operational activities and investigations."

This point is particularly pertinent to Europol, where officers do not have powers of arrest but work with a focus on intelligence, knowledge-sharing and the fostering of cooperation.

## Gender diversity as a performance driver

Time and again, studies<sup>3</sup> show a significantly better quality of decision-making within more gender-balanced leadership teams, with gender-balanced workplaces also performing better. In short, it is smart to have gender-balanced groups. Indeed, Europol's decision to explore gender-balance issues was based on the recognition that having a more diverse and balanced workforce would improve Europol's performance and results.

"Diversity matters and for all the right reasons. Policing is a job that is equally fitting for men as for women. Law enforcement should be a mirror

to society and gender balanced. There are enough studies to prove this", says Catherine de Bolle, Commissioner-General of the Belgian Federal Police.

Jens Henrik Højbjerg, National Commissioner of the Danish National Police, agrees. "I think it is absolutely crucial and pivotal that we are able to create a diverse organisation with people at management level - leaders - who reflect our diverse world, and it is not only about gender. If you don't have a diverse organisation with your staff representing all different professions, backgrounds, experiences, genders and so on, you will have problems."

While old-fashioned bosses can see women as problematic, sharper leaders are keen to shape working practices and business culture so that talent thrives. Women clearly bring new skills and perspectives to the table. This is one of the benefits that Europol could expect if more women joined the management team, according to Ignacio Cosidó Gutiérrez, Director of the Spanish National Police: "Women have appreciable skills in management and direction... they have good listening and delegation skills, a quite complete sense of reality and are generally very well organised. They are able to balance major strategies whilst giving special attention to the minor details, taking on responsibilities with great diligence."



This view was echoed by the senior law enforcement officials that took part in Europol's interviews. Maribel Cervantes, General Commissioner of the Mexican Federal Police, was one: "The vision women can provide is valuable, as well as their sensitivity, discipline and organisational skills." Sonia Alfano added: "Our particular capacity to plan our children's life, our daily routines and also our careers, has accustomed us to do and think about more than one task at a time."

In a law enforcement environment, gender balance has added benefits, as confirmed by Beatrice Abondio, Deputy Director of the Luxembourg Intelligence Service. "In the operational field, it is beneficial to have a mixed team because in analysis you have to be very open minded to see all the different hypotheses." Nathalie Pensaert, Head of Police and Customs Cooperation at the European Council, acknowledged this too: "I think the more diversity you have - not just gender-wise - but the more opinions and ideas you have, the more ideas you will get back."

So if it is clear that gender diversity means improved results, why are there not more talented women in decision-making roles? According to the 'glass ceiling' metaphor, women, despite joining organisations in record numbers, are then blocked from the upper levels of responsibility. This has led to decades of research about what women are doing wrong, and what they should change in order to break through.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the problem is more endemic than a 'glass ceiling'. In every organisation, the number of women relative to men drops at almost every management layer. This is true in every sector, in every country. The question is not what is wrong with women but what is wrong with the organisations? The work is to understand the nature of gender balance and to rid organisations of this problem. Because gender imbalance affects everyone and everything - performance, motivation, talent management, innovation, stakeholder relations - it is a universal issue.





## What holds women back?

Persistent barriers women face on their way to the top have meant that change has been slow in coming.<sup>4</sup> The first of those barriers is the combination of work and domestic responsibilities, which is difficult to reconcile with the 'anytime, anywhere' performance model where unfailing availability is expected, as well as geographic mobility. Beatrice Abondio recognises this: "It's not always easy to combine family and professional life, especially if you have to travel a lot. It requires a lot of organisation and also support from your family or partner."

There is also another important barrier: the reticence of many women to advocate for themselves. Michèle Coninsx, President of Eurojust, agrees: "Women need to be encouraged. The first thing she might think is 'I cannot do that', whereas the first thing a man thinks without much hesitation is, 'I can do that'." And Ignacio Cosidó Gutiérrez is acutely aware of these issues: "The great challenge is to improve working conditions to the extent that both men and women can decide and go for promotion without such barriers." "Three elements are equally important: one's talent has to be recognised, one has to be offered opportunities and one has to embrace the opportunities." adds Catherine de Bolle.

## Making it happen

McKinsey & Co, the global management consulting firm, surveyed hundreds of business leaders over four years to identify the gender-diversity measures required to lessen those barriers and develop women in management.<sup>4</sup> Amongst the 13 measures identified to help retain valued employees were:

- Offering the choice of a range of flexible working conditions and locations to female employees, facilitated by technology and policies such as teleworking and part-time hours
- Programmes to encourage female networking and role models
- Gender policies for hiring, retaining, promoting and developing women
- Skill-building programmes aimed specifically at women
- Mandates for senior executives to mentor junior women.

Through the development of such practices, some law enforcement authorities have seen significant progress in gender quality. Looking at her own organisation, the Luxembourg Intelligence Service, Beatrice Abondio says, "There has been a big evolution. When I started ... there were no women in high positions. And now we have almost reached a balance between men and women."

And she adds, "That is because we have our Director's support, so it was a conscious goal we were aiming for." Jens Henrik Højbjerg spoke of similar advances: "We have seen much gender-balance progress in Denmark... we reflect much more on different criteria than we did before."

The introduction of a gender-diversity policy is often a cultural revolution requiring full and visible commitment from all senior management to drive the changes in the organisation's culture. Catherine de Bolle recognises the importance of this senior management endorsement: "I came first in the selection process for Commissioner-General, but I still had to be appointed to the job. It took some political courage to break with tradition and appoint the first female in the highest ranking position." Once this evolution starts, then there will be a trickle-down effect, says Beatrice Abondio: "If you start with one or two women in high positions, this will slowly generate a change." Sonia Alfano added: "I would like to see male Europol colleagues expressing the need to have female colleagues and highlighting those who have the capacity and determination needed in such an environment."

These practices should be backed up by HR policies and processes, in addition to tools which can effectively identify inequalities and gaps, and measure progress. Law enforcement organisations such as Europol need to create the conditions that

will facilitate the work-life balance and mobility, ensuring women's most critical needs can be met.

Finally, our interviewees were asked if they had any advice to offer women looking to further their own careers, especially in the field of law enforcement. Sonia Alfano had a simple but powerful mantra: "If you have a dream and a goal you should pursue it with all your strength and determination." "Be an honest, hard-working person," said Michèle Coninsx, "believe in what you do and be passionate about what you do." "Be confident in your own skills and accept new challenges!" concluded Beatrice Abondio.

Women will make their own way to the top based on the supportive environment and policies that employers put in place. Europol's gender-balance project is embodied and actively supported by its senior managers, who have the responsibility and ability to embed gender diversity in the DNA of the entire organisation.

*If we are to remain competitive in the fight against international organised crime and achieve the desired successes, then we must embrace gender diversity, bringing together talent, skills and knowledge from all sides to create the most effective workforce.*

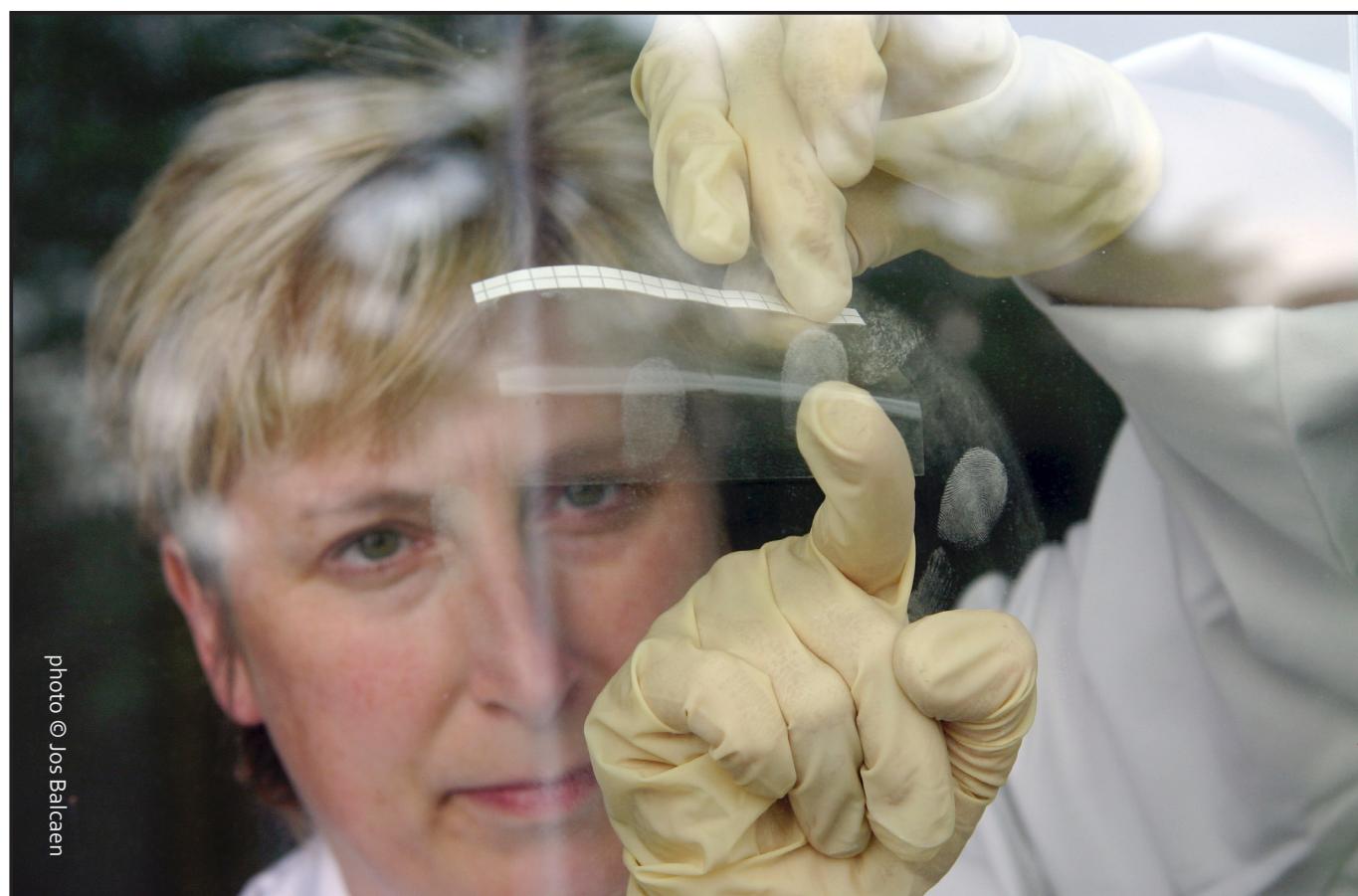


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Europol would like to thank the following interviewees for taking part in its gender-balance project:

**Beatrice Abondio**, Deputy Director of the Luxembourg Intelligence Service

**Sonia Alfano**, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) (Chair of the Special committee on organised crime, corruption and money-laundering (CRIM) and a member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE))

**Maribel Cervantes**, General Commissioner of the Mexican Federal Police

**Michèle Coninsx**, President of Eurojust

**Ignacio Cosidó Gutiérrez**, Director of the Spanish National Police

**Catherine de Bolle**, Commissioner-General of the Belgian Federal Police

**Jens Henrik Højbjerg**, National Commissioner of the Danish National Police

**Nathalie Pensaert**, Head of Police and Customs Cooperation at the European Council.

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> A Women's Charter. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52010DC0078:en:NOT>

<sup>3</sup> How Women Mean Business: A Step by Step Guide to Profiting from Gender Balanced Business, Avivah Wittenberg-Cox

<sup>4</sup> McKinsey & Company, Women matter global survey, [www.mckinsey.com](http://www.mckinsey.com)

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