



# The Situation of Women in Leadership Positions in Slovenian Police

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**Abstract:** This paper researches the position of women in leadership roles within the Slovenian Police. The authors research the current status of women in leadership positions and which leadership style is the most appropriate for law enforcement agencies. The purpose of this paper is to gather theoretical knowledge from the field of leadership in law enforcement and to determine whether women can lead just as effectively as men in this environment. While writing, multiple different methods were used, including the normative-dogmatic method, descriptive method and synthesis method. What the authors found out was that women are extraordinarily rare in Slovenian police leadership. They still face some troubles when going for promotion. Gender equality as stated under the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act is nowhere near achieved. It was also confirmed that women are just as capable and successful leaders in law enforcement as men are.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Slovenian police is an independent body within the Ministry of Interior. It operates at three levels: the state level, the regional level and the local level. Organisationally this means Slovenian police is composed of General Police Directorate on the state level, of Police Directorates on the local levels and of Police stations on the local level. Slovenian police is led by the Director General of the Police. He or she also leads the General Police Directorate (Police a, n.d.). According to data published on the Slovenian Police website, as of 31 December 2023, the police employ a total of 8,162 people, of whom 2,252 are women. Out of the total 8,162 people, 7,083 are categorised as ‘police officer’, of whom 1,366 are women (Police b, n.d.; Čas & Podnar, 2024, p. 24).

The Slovenian legal order guarantees equality before the law through the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (URS). Discrimination on the grounds of sex is prohibited (URS, 1991, Art. 14). No one, not even the authorities, can or should interfere with human rights and fundamental freedoms arbitrarily and without legal justification (Pozdrec & Kotnik, 2022, p. 191). The Constitution does dictate that how human rights and fundamental freedoms are exercised may be prescribed by law where the Constitution so provides or where the very nature of a particular right or freedom makes it necessary (Pozdrec & Božjak, 2023, p. 8). However, the right to equality before the law should not be understood as an absolute equality of all persons, as this would be contrary to the general principles of justice (Strojan, 2005, p. 99). Taking into account our legal order, the police should be the first to respect all human rights and act against discrimination. Police officers must comply with the legal provisions in their work, so that the tasks are carried out professionally and legally (Pozdrec & Čas, 2024, pp. 218 – 224). Following the above, Slovenian police should by its nature actively work to ensure equal treatment of its employees.

Although women do police a little differently than men, they do it successfully. They rely more on their communication skills rather than on their physical strength. They have many good qualities

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that help them to do police work well. Women are tactful in their work and people trust them. They are also a good reflection of the police organization as a whole, as they receive fewer complaints about their work from citizens. There is a need for women in the police (Flanagan, 2009, p. 14). This is particularly true in management or leadership structures, where the average number of female leaders is only between 1 and 3%. Such low representation creates a power dynamic that provides male police leaders with access and opportunities that are not necessarily available to female leaders. The difference between male and female leaders in this context lies in the dominance of men and in the common belief that men are better leaders than women. This automatically leads to a lack of respect for female leaders in the police (Gregory, 2023, p. 2, 3, 11, 12.). In her research, Podnar found that the Slovenian police employ around 18% female police officers, but they occupy only 3.6% of leadership positions (Podnar, 2024, p. 71). The Slovenian police itself states that the number of women working in police organisations is slowly increasing over time, while they are still significantly under-represented in certain areas of work (Police c, n.d.). Equality is guaranteed by law, but social reality does not always follow (Podnar, 2024, p. 9).

Article 5 of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (ZEMŽM) defines two forms of discrimination, namely direct and indirect. Direct discrimination on grounds of sex exists when a person has been, is or could be treated less favourably than a person of the opposite sex in the same or similar circumstances because of his or her sex. Indirect discrimination on grounds of sex exists where, in similar or identical circumstances, apparently neutral provisions, practices or criteria place persons of one sex in a less favourable position, except where they are necessary, appropriate and justified based on objective facts unrelated to sex (ZEMŽM, 2002, Art. 5.). This law sets out specific and general measures to prevent discrimination and its consequences. The measures also aim to create equal opportunities in areas where the sexes are unequally represented. Under this law, the sexes are unequally represented when the representation of one sex in a particular field is less than 40%. (ZEMŽM, 2002, Art. 7; Čas & Podnar, 2024, p. 27). If we compare the 40% with the 18% of female police officers in the Slovenian police, we realise that there is still a long way to go to achieve gender balance in Slovenian police. It is no longer a way to achieve gender balance in police management positions, even if we count 18% as balanced (as Podnar did in her study).

## 2. LEADERSHIP IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

The leaders in law enforcement today are encountering one of the most challenging periods in policing history. From a broad perspective, organizations are under heightened pressure to reassess their methods while navigating a constantly evolving cultural, technological, and social environment. On the other hand, new police officers are entering the profession with different expectations regarding their roles and the leadership they seek. Some believe that leadership is an inherent trait rather than a skill that can be acquired through education, experience, and mentorship. Fortunately for law enforcement agencies nationwide and globally, police leaders are discovering that the competencies required for effective leadership are continuously evolving. The field of policing is, by its very nature, a discipline that must adapt to progress—police leadership follows suit (Fritsvold, n.d.).

Theory recognises many different leadership styles. It is also true that each leader leads in his or her own way. Among the most common are the transformational and transactional leadership styles (Motsamai, 2023, p. 2096). According to Kurt Lewin's theory, there are three main styles of leadership, namely authoritarian or autocratic, inclusive or democratic (also transformational), and passive or laissez-faire (Lewin et al., 1939, p. 272).

The autocratic style is characterized by no feedback and no discussion. Such leaders make all decisions themselves and demand that they be accepted and followed. This style of leading was most common in police organizations in the past. Still today, it can be very useful in certain situations police deal with, however, most of the time a leadership style that includes employees more, leads to better results. The democratic leadership style enables leaders to involve others in the decision-making process. It is very effective for problem-solving and in environments where people work in teams. That being said, a police leader needs to be able to switch up his or her leadership style according to the situation he or she is in and depending on the person he or she is communicating with. It means that a good leader will be very adaptable and will also be willing to leave the comfort zone of his or her “default” leadership style, to broaden his or her perspective through others (Scism, n.d.).

Sarver and Miller’s 2013 study found that the three leadership styles - transformational, passive and transactional - are used by male leaders in roughly equal proportions. The survey did not also identify the use of the authoritarian style. Women, on the other hand, prefer the transformational style to a greater extent. They also found that transformational leaders receive fewer formal and informal complaints than leaders who use transactional or passive leadership styles (Sarver & Miller, 2014, pp. 133 – 134).

Durić conducted a survey of the Slovenian police in which he found out which leadership styles are presented at different organisational levels of the police and what is the relationship between the leadership style and its outcome. He found that compared to the transactional leadership style, the transformational style is represented in a higher proportion in the Slovenian police. The higher the organisational level of an individual, the more likely he or she is to use a transformational style (or to perceive him or herself as a transformational leader). At the local level, there is a strong correlation between transformational leadership, effectiveness and extra effort. The study found that leaders at different organisational levels see the link between leadership style and the results it delivers differently. In particular, they understand and perceive the link between contingent rewards and leadership outcomes better than between elements of transformational leadership and leadership outcomes. Durić notes that a transformational leadership style can add a great deal to police effectiveness (Durić, 2011, pp. 204 – 205).

Žužman emphasises that leadership in the police is specific and cannot be equated with leadership in other civilian organisations. Police officers are confronted daily with the bureaucratisation of the system, with an often “military style” management and with internal politics, while at the same time trying to meet the conflicting interests of the public. In addition to legal and professional knowledge, police managers need organisational, psychological, logistical and IT skills. The success of a police organisation also depends on the personality of the leaders and their behavioural habits. Managers have a major influence on employee satisfaction. A good relationship with police officers must therefore be actively pursued (Žužman, 2014, p. 13). Leadership in law enforcement requires a sense of empowerment. A good leader should motivate his officers while providing them with freedom to take initiative and have discretion in making their own judgements. They should also be provided with training opportunities and a chance for professional improvement. Mentorship programs and promotion chances add to the feeling of job satisfaction and community (Motsamai, 2023, p. 2101).

In 2023, the Slovenian Police published the Police Competency Assessment and Development Manual, which serves as a source of information for related HR processes and enables the identification of talent, potential and successors for a wide range of positions. The handbook lists and

describes in detail the competences that a police officer or a police manager should have. The leadership competences, which apply to all positions within the police force comprise the five core competences that every police officer should have, plus four additional competences. The first five, which a leader should possess at a higher level than police officers, are a commitment to professionalism, proactive action, handling challenging situations, working with the community and acting responsibly. The other four are organizational skills, being goal-oriented, fostering good relationships and caring for officer's professional development (Juričko et al., 2023, p. 15, 23).

### 3. WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

It is clearly expressed and confirmed in literature that there are barriers, prejudices and stereotypes against women within police organisations, which hinder the integration and advancement or promotion of women in the police. Police managers and leaders have the greatest role and responsibility in addressing such a culture in the workplace (Rubio et al., 2021, pp. 15 – 18).

Still, successful women leaders have shown that successful leadership is not necessarily the result of a single, chiseled leadership style, and that the command-and-control style favoured by men is not the only path to success. It is true that the first female leaders most often modelled the way male leaders behave, because it has been proven to be successful. Later, however, women found their own way and style of leadership and became successful in management positions not in spite of their feminine qualities, but because of them. While men are more inclined to use transactional leadership and to rely on the power of their position and formal authority, women are more likely to use transformational leadership style. They rely more on interpersonal relationships with employees and hard work rather than on organisational structure. They make a conscious effort to make interactions with employees enjoyable, share information, encourage collaboration, and improve the view employees have of themselves. All of this allows employees to be involved and to feel empowered and important, which makes management easier and is good for the efficiency of the work process. Rosener described this as interactive leadership, the essence of which is to promote inclusion. When engagement tactics don't work, they change their approach to a more unilateral way of communicating, which is more typical of leadership. (Rosener, 1990, pp. 119 – 125).

Literature also suggests that women are better androgynous leaders than men. The outcomes of women's leadership tend to be more compassionate, benevolent and ethical (Lakshimi Chaluvadi, 2015, p. 11).

### 4. WOMEN'S SITUATION IN SLOVENIAN POLICE

Although the percentage of women in the police force is rising, we must take into account the possibility that the percentage of women in the police is increasing on account of a reduction in the number of all officers in the police force, which happens in police organisations when a larger number of officers who were recruited at a time when women were not accepted, retire (Rubio et al., 2021, p. 2).

In 2023, the Slovenian police issued a research report on some aspects of organisational life in the police. The survey was specifically focused on identifying gender differences. The survey was carried out using an online survey method with a general invitation to all police employees of which 996 persons submitted a questionnaire. Respondents were asked whether women and men are treated equally in the police. They answered quite differently. 76.4% of women and 46.8% of men disagreed with this statement. Research also showed that the average performance ratings between 2019 and 2021 showed no significant differences between the sexes. The average

performance rating of men in 2020 was 4.79 (out of 5) and for women 4.67. It was slightly lower for both genders the year before and the year after, with the average of women's job evaluations in each of these years lower than for men. The gender differences are statistically significant in all years ( $p = 0.000$ ). The results of the question on,

whether they agree with the statement that "an organisational culture which makes it easier for men to be successful and recognised as such, has an impact on women's potential disadvantage in their career path" show, that 85.2% of women agree with the statement, while 68.7% men disagree with it (Koporec Oberčkal et al., 2023, p. 31, 39, 42, 68).

When it comes to career aspirations, the results of this survey show that the majority (87.3% of men and 96.9% of women, i.e. almost all of them) of both genders desire promotion to a higher or different position within the Slovenian police. 89.6% of women and 76.6% of men say they want to be promoted to more demanding jobs, and 96.1% of women and 80.9% of men also express a desire for further training. The relationship between gender and the desire to take further training and move to a different or more demanding job is statistically significant ( $p > 0.01$ ). Women expressed a bigger desire for promotion. (Koporec Oberčkal et al., 2023, pp. 75 – 76). Podnar also found that the women in Slovenian police on average have a higher education than male officers (Podnar, 2024, p. 73).

Further research showed a diametrically different perception of women's position concerning their equal opportunities. Women disagree that they are treated equally than men in the police, while men overwhelmingly think that they are. Women also overwhelmingly disagree with the statement that they have the same influence as men in managerial positions, while men agree with the statement. The same applies to women's career opportunities and advancement and women's fulfillment of their work potential. Women overwhelmingly feel that none of these are realised, while men feel that they are (Koporec Oberčkal et al., 2023, pp. 112 – 113).

Podnar specifically researched the position of women in leadership positions in the Slovenian police. She used the numerical data, received by the Ministry of the Interior, and conducted the research which showed exact numbers of female leaders in Slovenian police in all three organizational levels. Research showed that Slovenian police employ a little over 18% of female police officers, but have only 3.6% female leaders. Women leaders are best represented at the state level, where they represent 4.6% of leaders. On the other hand, the smallest number of women leaders is at the local level (where there is only one kind of leadership position – chief of the police station), where they represent 2.9% of leaders. She researched the data for assistant leadership positions as well. Results showed, that women occupy 10% of all assistant leadership positions. While looking at the organizational levels, it shows that they occupy 10.4% of local assistant positions and 8.1% of assistant positions at the state level. There are no assistant leadership positions filled with women at the regional level. However, we must point out, that there are very few such positions all in all at the regional level (Podnar, 2024, pp. 67 – 70).

## 5. POLICE (SUB)CULTURE

Many articles have been written on the subject of police subculture and the personality of police officers, but there is still no clear answer to the question of whether there really is a police subculture and what the main personality traits of police officers should be. Some of the main characteristics that the profession associates with the police personality are courage, loyalty, authoritativeness, cynicism, suspiciousness, assertiveness, suspicion, conservatism, argumentativeness, decisiveness,



dominance and alienation (TenEyck, 2024, p. 271). Jetmore defined the development of organizational culture as “the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thought, speech, action, and artifacts” and also depends on man’s ability for learning and passing down the knowledge to next generations (Jetmore, 1997, pp. 1 – 2, as cited in Motsamai Modise & Raga, 2022, p. 1908).

The police subculture is manifested mainly in the attitudes, norms, values and work rules that influence individual behaviour. It has developed as a problem-solving mechanism and manifests itself in specific behaviours that are intended to help police officers cope with tensions in the service. However, even within a police organisation there is no single subculture, but several different ones that have developed based on the place, time and social context in which the individual carries out his or her work (Meško & Arh, 2004, p. 364).

The term “deviance” is often used in connection with the police subculture. It is said to be an aberrant subculture, the paradox being that certain qualities which a police officer must have to do his job well, can quickly degenerate or become excesses. Police leaders are no exception. They are in the unenviable position of needing the respect of their subordinates because their performance and reputation depend on the work of police officers. Police officers in the field who do not respect the leader, and consequently do not follow their instructions, are rebellious, do not trust their leader, and may even act arbitrarily or illegally, which casts a bad light on the leader. Whether or not a police subculture will develop, depends hugely on the leader. In this respect, it is particularly important to continuously educate police officers and remind them of the organisation’s goals and values (Meško, 1994, p. 146).

A police (sub)culture also has a negative view of women in policing. Discrimination against women in that regard still exists to this day, though the situation is improving. Podnar found that women still face a glass ceiling regarding promotion, women in managerial positions face inappropriate and sexist comments, and they have to prove themselves more than their male counterparts to be respected. Police subculture is distinctly masculine and male-oriented, and so pervasive that sometimes women are not even aware of it. However, it is the police culture that needs to change to finally embrace women. There are still vulgar jokes, sexism and the glorification of typically masculine qualities present, which automatically excludes women and devalues them (Podnar, 2024, p. 72).

## 6. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There are more and more articles about women in the police and law enforcement as a whole, which we consider positive. Given the slow growth in the number of women in the police, it is right that this topic is highlighted. This is all the more true in Slovenia, where Podnar’s research was the first of its kind in the Slovenian police. However, although the number of female police officers is steadily growing, this does not seem to be the case in the area of managerial or leadership positions, where the figures have been hovering around 3% for some time. Given this, the authors of this paper will potentially repeat the survey to establish the trend of Slovenian policewomen in managerial positions. Only by repeating the same survey will it be possible to determine whether or not the situation is improving.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Women police officers have proven themselves over the years. They are an equal partner to their male counterparts and any argument about their weakness and inadequacy is refuted and unconfirmed. Data shows that, on average, women in Slovenian police have a higher level of education, a greater desire for promotion and a greater desire for further education. Although we have not

specifically researched the reasons for the low number of women in leadership positions within the police, arguments such as “they don’t want to” and “they do not qualify” have already been challenged. Policewomen also receive fewer complaints against their procedures, enjoy greater public confidence and use less coercive means. Nevertheless, without an active and dedicated approach to the problem by the police as an institution, the situation will not change on its own, since most police officers are still men - as the Slovenian police survey itself shows (Koporec Oberčkal et al., 2023, p. 39, 122) - do not see a problem in attitudes towards equality for women in the police, but rather believe that equality has been achieved.

We can conclude that women are just as capable leaders as men, not just in general but also in law enforcement. Although they may lead in a different style, compared to men, they achieve results and get work done. Their different approach to leading (which some consider “soft”) does not reduce the effectiveness or efficiency of their leadership. Accordingly, we conclude that it is not only sensible but necessary for the police to actively strive for gender balance in general and in leadership positions in particular.

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