

United Nations Portal on Women in Justice and Security

Findings from Phase 1
data collection, 2026



About DCAF

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice, and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

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Gender equality in good security sector governance

➤ **Gender equality is not peripheral to the security and justice sector; it is an essential element. As DCAF's work has established, each principle of good security sector governance – accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency – requires gender equality for its realization. A security sector that serves or represents only a portion of the population is, by definition, neither accountable nor effective.**

Gender inequality within security and justice institutions limits the use of human resources, compromises service delivery, and leaves entire segments of the population – overwhelmingly women and girls – inadequately protected.

The evidence base on what works to enhance women's participation and wider gender equality in security and justice institutions has grown considerably over the last two decades.

DCAF's research identifies a consistent set of pathways for advancing gender equality in the security and justice sector: defining security needs in an inclusive gender-responsive manner; establishing policy frameworks that embed gender equality into governance; training personnel; deploying specialist gender expertise; and – critically – challenging masculine institutional culture.

The absence of systematic comparable data is, however, a persistent obstacle to progress. Robust data on women's participation, the

barriers they face, and the measures that have proven effective remains fragmented, incomplete, and often inaccessible. Without such data, institutions cannot set evidence-based objectives, monitor progress, or identify and scale effective practices. Oversight bodies – parliaments, national human rights institutions, civil society – lack the evidence to hold institutions to account.

It is this gap that the UN Portal on Women in Justice and Security seeks to address. This new UN Portal builds on a pioneering dataset created by the UN Security Sector Reform Unit in 2024, which collected barriers, good practices, and policy options to advance women's participation in the defence sector.

This new initiative expands that approach to other rule of law and security institutions, starting with corrections, police, justice, military justice, and mine action bodies. The UN Portal aims to offer a centralized and accessible repository of data on the status of women in justice and security institutions, enabling Member States and the UN to analyse participation and good practices so that barriers to gender equality and inclusion can be addressed.



Purpose

> This report presents an analytical summary of the initial data collected for the UN Portal on Women in Justice and Security: Member State responses to surveys on women's participation in police, justice and corrections institutions. The data covers the period 2014–2024 and was submitted by Member States to the UN between 29 April and 21 August 2026.

The analysis seeks to address the following overarching questions: What patterns of women's participation, retention, and leadership emerge across justice and security institutions worldwide? And which institutional, social and cultural factors and practices are associated with more inclusive, accountable and gender-responsive outcomes?

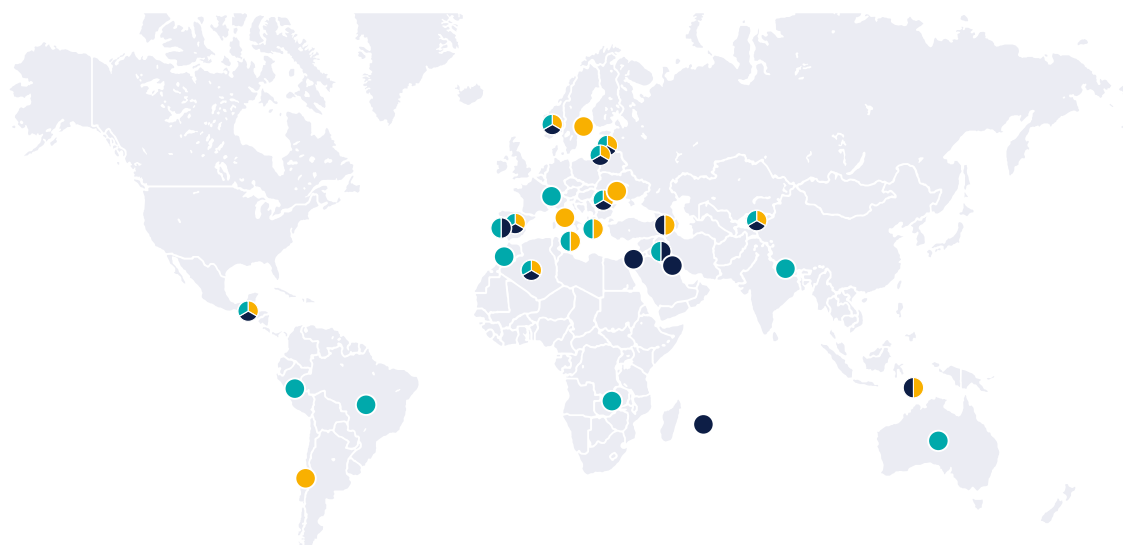
Because this report covers only the very first phase of data collection and a modest number of responses, its conclusions are necessarily tentative. The report's aim is to demonstrate the potential for the UN Portal on Women in Justice and Security to be a powerful source of data and evidence for the UN and Member States' continuing work to enhance gender equality in justice and security.

The analysis draws on responses submitted by 19 Member States to the police survey, 15 to the justice survey, and 16 to the corrections survey. Respondents span Europe; Latin America; the Middle East and North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Central, South and Southeast Asia; and Oceania – although some of these regions submitted responses from just one type of institution. *See Figure 1.*

Figure 1. Member States participating in Phase 1 of data collection

States that submitted at least one police, justice or corrections survey

● Corrections ● Justice ● Police



Not all respondents provided data for all questions or all reference years. Where applicable, data availability is noted. The report begins with a cross-sectoral analysis, which draws out comparative and shared findings concerning women's participation and leadership, barriers, and measures.

It then examines in more detail three dimensions within the police, corrections and justice sectors:

- participation (who is represented, at what levels, and how this has changed over time);
- barriers (the structural, institutional and cultural factors that constrain equal opportunities); and
- good practices (the policies, mechanisms, and measures that Member States report as supporting women's recruitment, retention, and career progression).

Beyond sharing some illustrative good practices, this report does not publish country-specific data. It uses aggregated and anonymized data to promote the exchange of good practices and effective strategies, while respecting the confidentiality of individual submissions.



Cross-sectoral analysis

Women's Participation and Leadership

Across policing, justice, and corrections combined, the data for 2024 from 27 countries shows the **average for women's participation at 37.4%**.

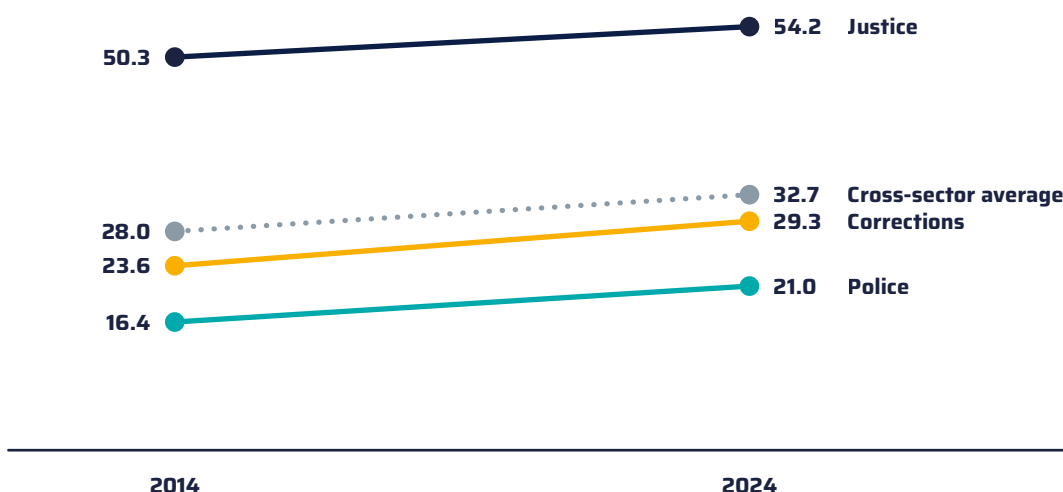
Among a smaller number of institutions that provided data for both **2014 and 2024**, the average for women's participation increased from 28% in 2014 to 32.7% in 2024, an increase of 4.7 percentage points. *See Figure 2.*

A hierarchy of women's representation emerges:

- The justice sector has the highest levels of women's participation among the countries submitting data, with an average representation of 52% in 2024. Women's representation in judicial and prosecutorial positions is near-equal that of men, at 50.1% and 49.6% respectively in 2024. Women hold 57.4% of administrative positions. However, this equitable representation tapers off, as only 37.5% of senior positions are held by women: a 'women's leadership gap' of 14.1 percentage points.

Figure 2. Women's participation in policing, justice and corrections, 2014 and 2024

Sector and cross-sector averages for institutions reporting data in both years, %



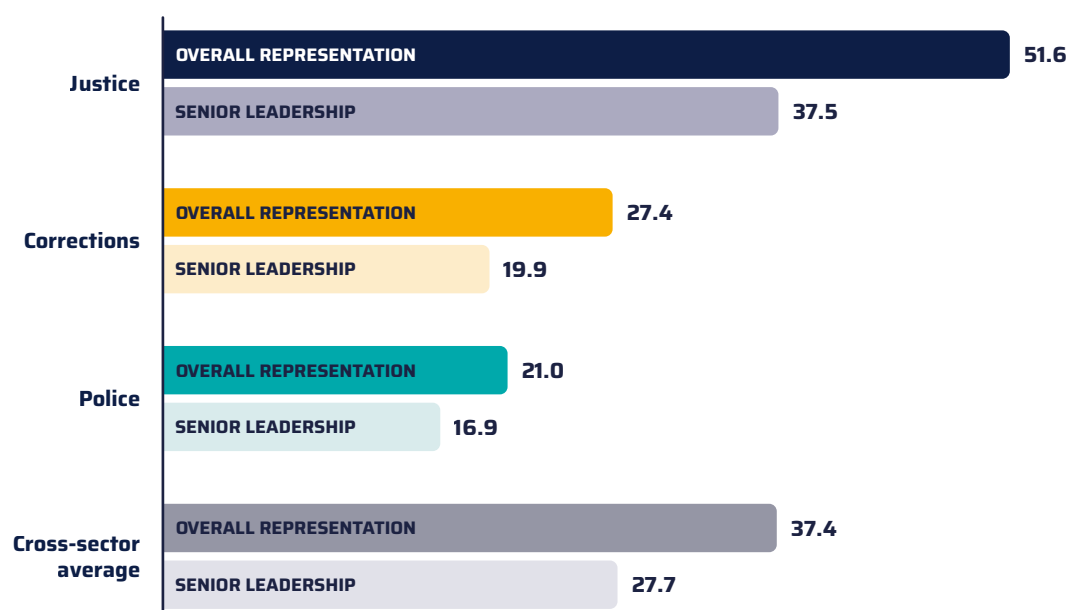
- **The corrections sector occupies the middle position, with an average of 27% women across the sector in 2024** and a positive growth trend of 5.7 percentage points over the past decade. However, women's representation is heavily shaped by the roles they occupy, with the three most common being prisoner welfare at 48.9%, medical services at 48.4%, and administration at 44.2%. Women are under-represented in senior leadership positions, with an average representation of 19.9% and a women's leadership gap of 7.5 percentage points.
- **The policing sector has the lowest levels of women's participation, with an average of 21% in 2024**, ranging from 5% to 53%. Policing units specializing in gender-based violence have the highest levels of women's

participation, at 57.5%, with the next closest being anti-corruption units at 30.4%. Women make up only 14.0% of traffic police and highway patrol units, and just 4.9% of rapid response units. Despite this, the policing sector has the lowest gap in women's leadership. With 16.9% of senior leadership roles held by women, the women's leadership gap is 4.1 percentage points.

- Across responses from the three sectors – justice, corrections, and police – in 2024 women's representation averages 37.4%, but averages just 27.7% in senior leadership roles: a **women's leadership gap of 9.7 percentage points**. *See Figure 3.* There were only four institutions with women in leadership roles at a rate proportionate to or higher than their general participation.

Figure 3. Women's participation and senior leadership, 2024

Average reported female shares by sector and across all three sectors, %



Barriers

The Member States were asked in the surveys whether a series of barriers to women's participation were present in their institution and, if so, how severe they were. Respondents generally rated most barriers as minor. Police and corrections institutions acknowledged barriers more often, and rated them more severely, than justice institutions did. Because these ratings are institutional self-assessments, they may understate the barriers women experience.

Where barriers were rated moderate or higher, the following patterns emerge across sectors (see Figure 4):

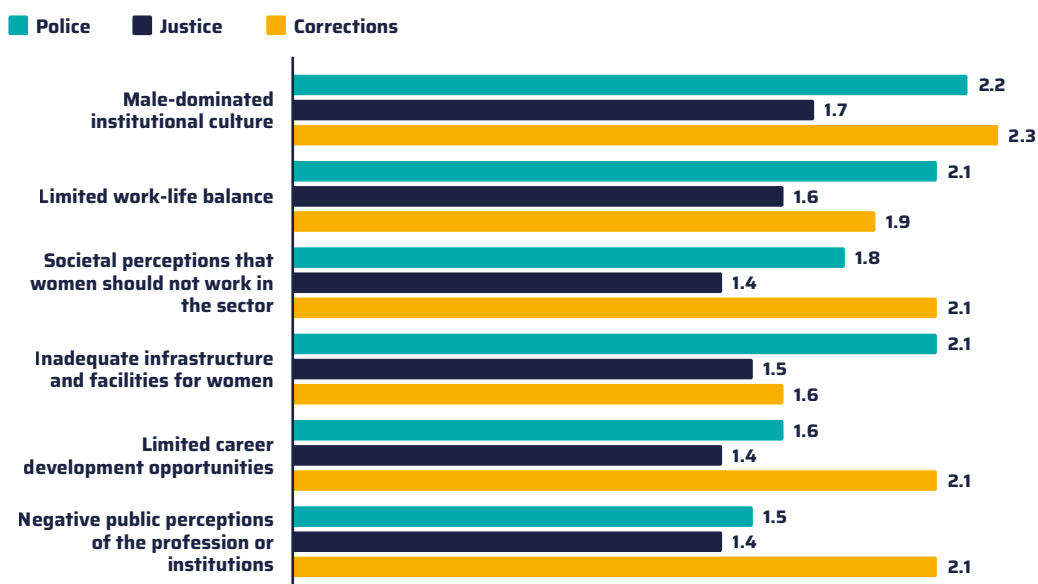
- **Male-dominated institutional culture** had the highest average severity rating as a barrier in police and corrections, and the joint highest in justice, with sexual harassment. One respondent, drawing on market research, linked it to traditional views of policing as requiring strength and aggression.

- **Limited work-life balance** is reported in all three sectors, though generally not rated as severe. Police respondents pointed to shift patterns and remote postings. Justice respondents linked it to high caseloads, with one identifying time spent on research as the main obstacle to women reaching senior judicial posts.
- **Societal perceptions that the work is more suited to men** are reported in both police and corrections, including a lack of awareness among women of career opportunities in corrections.
- **Limited career development and mentoring** are reported in police, corrections, and justice.

Some barriers were sector-specific: inadequate infrastructure and facilities (police) and negative public perceptions of the profession (corrections). There was no clear association in this data between how severely institutions rated barriers and their level of women's representation.

Figure 4. Highest-rated barriers to women's participation across policing, justice and corrections

Average institutional severity ratings by sector, on a scale of 1–5



Good Practices

In the surveys, institutions were asked which measures were in place to support women's recruitment, promotion and career development, and retention. They were also asked about institutional gender equality structures, mechanisms regarding sexual misconduct, and barrier assessments.

The most widely reported measures in all three sectors were maternity and paternity leave, and basic physical infrastructure for women, such as women-only bathrooms and changing rooms.

Half of corrections respondents, 57% of justice respondents, and 69% of police respondents reported measures targeting sexist institutional culture. See Figure 5.

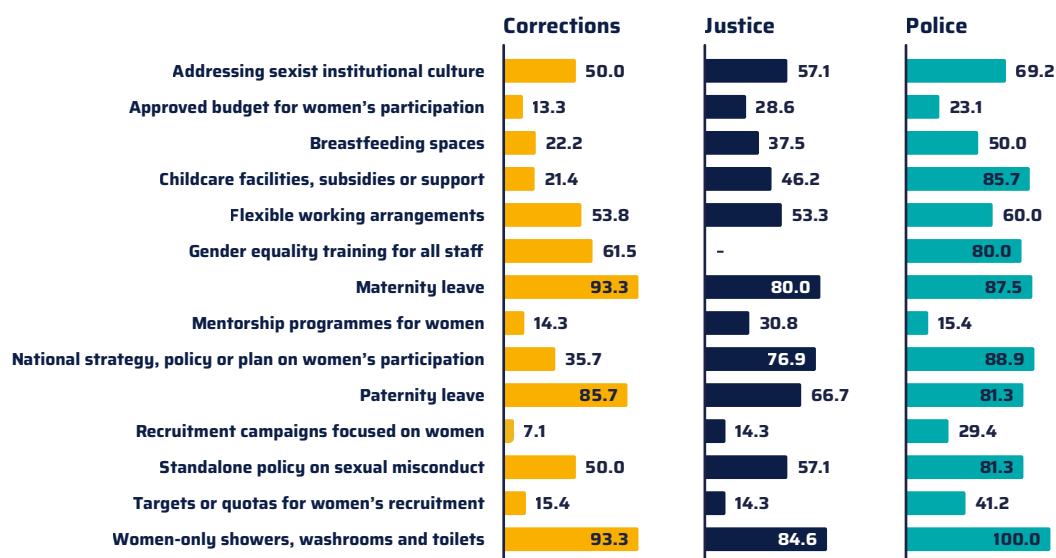
Measures that go further are less common:

- **Flexible working.** Only 53% of justice respondents reported flexible working arrangements, despite work-life balance and caseloads being identified as barriers.
- **Recruitment.** Police institutions most often reported recruitment measures for women, but only 41% set recruitment targets or quotas, and only 29% ran recruitment campaigns targeting women. Very few corrections services reported any proactive recruitment measures.
- **Promotion and leadership.** Fewer than half of police institutions and only three corrections services had measures such as mentoring, promotion targets, or new career paths for women.

The dataset is not yet large enough to reliably connect measures with outcomes.

Figure 5. Selected measures to support women's participation across policing, justice and corrections

Percentage of institutions reporting each measure, among those providing a Yes or No response



Response numbers vary by measure and sector. Missing and not-applicable responses are excluded.

- **Widen the pipeline for women's recruitment and support women's advancement.** Almost every respondent noted the existence of maternity leave and basic facilities for women; however, measures that widen the pipeline of women entering the security and justice sector (targets, campaigns) or support progression to leadership (mentoring, promotion targets) are much less common in all sectors. This failure to implement measures to support women's career development and advancement is consistent with the women's leadership gap observed in all three sectors. Moreover, while functional segregation between men and women was strongly evident in policing and corrections, no evidence of measures to address this was identified.

The UN and DCAF have documented a wealth of examples, models, and evidence of the impacts of women-specific recruitment campaigns and mechanisms to support women's advancement in the security and justice sector. The dearth of these approaches in the datasets suggests that wider exchange between nations and capacity building could be valuable.

- **Address work-life balance holistically and culturally.** While some institutions already provide flexible working arrangements and childcare facilities and support, work-life balance remains a pervasive barrier for women.

Approaches to work-life balance need to go deeper, recognising the role of attitudes towards women's and men's respective roles in the workplace and in the home. Security sector institutions might consider how they can contribute to a more equitable distribution of roles between men and women in both areas, for example, by supporting their male staff to undertake care responsibilities.

- **Strengthen national data systems.** Most Member States taking part in this research could not provide comprehensive data, particularly regarding history, seniority and function. This suggests that the effectiveness of the UN Portal on Women in Justice and Security in compiling and sharing data would be strengthened through initiatives that support Member States in systematically collecting and analysing data on women's participation. Established methodologies such as the ILO Participatory Gender Audit; DCAF's Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP); and DCAF's Gender Self-Assessment Guide for the Police, Armed Forces and Justice Sector could be applied.



Key opportunities for progress

- **Match commitments to women's participation with structures and resources.** Legal prohibition of sex discrimination is near-universal: 94% in police and corrections, 93% in justice. National strategies or plans on women's participation are less common: 89% in policing, 77% in justice and 36% in corrections. Dedicated budgets and mechanisms to implement them, such as gender advisers, focal points, or gender units, are less common still. In institutions with a strategy, they were in place in 56% of the police institutions, three of the five corrections services, and three of the ten justice institutions.

Wider research has demonstrated that institutional structures and measures to promote women's participation are key to progress, including policies, clear targets, leadership support and responsibilities, expertise, and resources.

- **Assess barriers to women's participation regularly.** Only 35% of police, 27% of corrections, and 42% of justice respondents had assessed obstacles to women's participation since 2014.

This indicates limited institutional understanding of barriers, even in many institutions with a strategy, policy, or plan to increase women's participation. Without such assessments, institutions lack the evidence base to inform reviews of policy and practices, and to surface structurally entrenched issues, such as a male-dominated workplace culture. The low uptake of barrier assessments represents a missed opportunity for evidence-based reform and monitoring.

- **Enhance frameworks to address sexual misconduct.** Stand-alone policies were reported by 81% of police, 57% of justice and 50% of corrections respondents. Mandatory training is the weakest element everywhere: 56% in policing, 36% in corrections, and 21% in justice. Only 33% of police institutions and 3 of 14 corrections services reported all 4 elements (policy, specialist investigators, mandatory training, and confidential survivor support). The low level of training in justice is notable given that sexual harassment is identified as a barrier in that sector.

Given the well-evidenced importance of preventing sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse to safety and dignity at work and to institutional accountability, these disparities warrant attention. This can be expected to improve not only women's participation but also overall staff morale and retention.

- **Transform institutional culture.** Male-dominated institutional culture is the barrier most often reported as severe across sectors, suggesting it is a systemic cross-institutional challenge. Yet measures addressing sexist institutional culture are lacking in 30% to 50% of institutions.

Institutions' recognition of the challenge of male-dominated institutional culture illustrates that social norms and attitudes towards women within institutions, expressed through expectations regarding women's and men's work, remain at the core of the barriers faced by women in security and justice institutions. Notably, many police and corrections institutions also identified social attitudes in the wider public arena towards women working in those roles as a key barrier. This highlights the need for interlinked work: societal engagement alongside internal institutional efforts towards gender equality.



POLICIE

Police

Key Data Points: Women's Participation

How has women's representation evolved (2014–2024)?

In 2024, across 17 countries, women's representation in police institutions ranged from 5% to 53.01%, with an average of 21%. The majority of institutions reported their personnel as comprising between 10% and 27% of women. Among the 15 Member State police institutions that provided data for both 2014 and 2024, the majority report an increase in women's representation over the decade, with an average gain of 4.5 percentage points. Only two states reported small declines in women's representation. The average representation of women in police institutions in 2024 among these 15 countries stands at 21%, up from 16.4% in 2014.

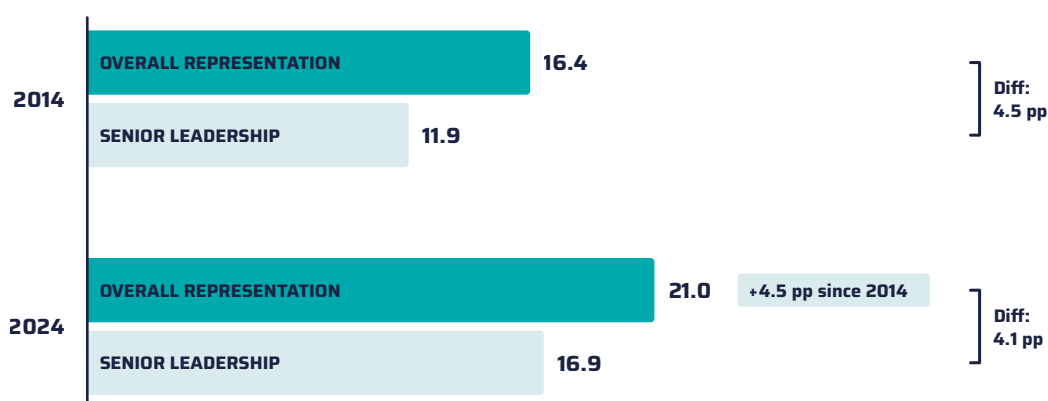
Data was received from different types of policing structures, including state and federal police, regional police, border police, and armed police. Around 30% of Member States' responses excluded some or all of sub-national or regional police forces.

Are women equally represented at leadership levels?

Of the 12 Member State police institutions that provided seniority-disaggregated data for 2024, a consistent pattern emerged: women are under-represented at senior command levels relative to their overall representation in the institution. The average share of women at senior command level is 16.9%, compared with the sector-wide average of 21%, a women's leadership gap of 4.1 percentage points. See *Figure 6*.

Figure 6. Women's participation and senior leadership in policing, 2014 and 2024

Average reported shares of women in overall personnel and senior leadership positions, %



How does women's representation vary by function?

A total of 15 Member State police institutions provided data on women's representation disaggregated within specific staff categories and specialist units. Specialist police units handling cases involving violence against women saw the highest proportion of women, at 57.5%, with responses ranging from 16% to 84%. Women were also relatively well represented in anti-corruption units, at an average of 30.4%, and were present above the police average in environmental crime and drug enforcement units. Women were also better represented in detective and investigative roles, versus general law enforcement and crime prevention roles.

Women were, on average, notably under-represented among traffic police and highway patrol units (14%), in gendarmerie (6.7%), and in rapid response units. Rapid response units held an average women's representation rate of just 4.9% across 12 states providing data; in 9 of these, less than 2%.

Barriers to Equal Opportunities

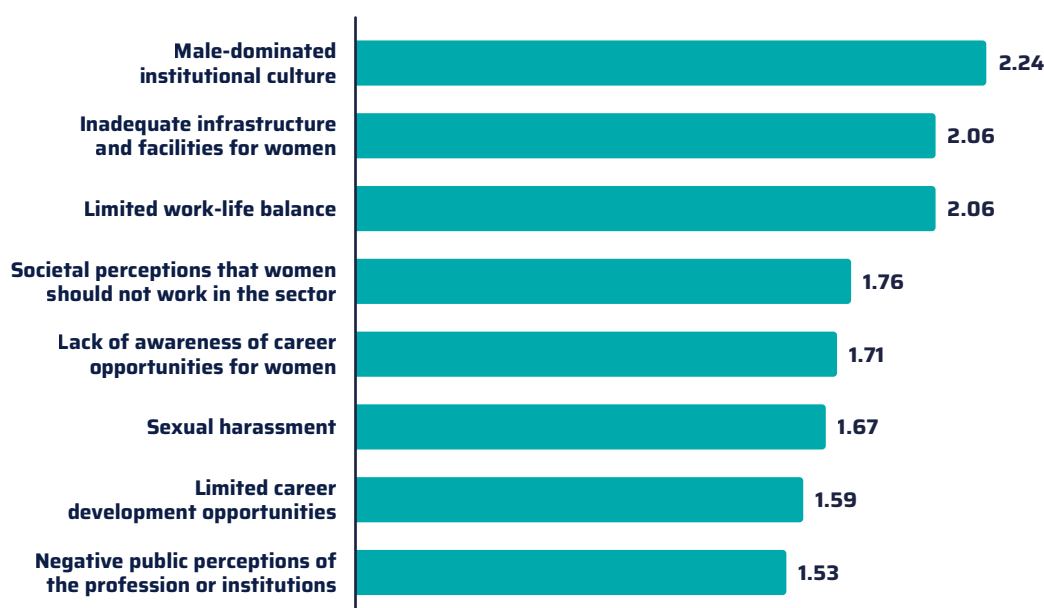
Of the 19 Member States responding to the police survey, 17 rated the barriers to women's participation. Although many different types of barriers were acknowledged, respondents almost always assessed them as minor in character. See Figure 7.

Of those barriers to women assessed as moderate, high, or very high, the following were most often reported:

- **Male-dominated institutional culture of the police:** This barrier had the highest average severity rating.
- **Inadequate infrastructure and facilities for women:** While many respondents provide basic spaces for women, few reported exercise facilities for women or maternity uniforms. Zambia used Elsie Initiative funding to build 40 rooms and a day-care facility.

Figure 7. Reported barriers to women's participation in policing

Average institutional ratings, from 1 (not a barrier) to 5 (very high)



These allow nursing mothers and mothers of young children to attend peacekeeping training, demonstrating that infrastructure investment can be linked to broader participation objectives.

- **Limited work-life balance policies:** Respondents highlighted shift patterns and the operational tempo of policing as factors that disproportionately affect women with caring responsibilities. One respondent noted through market research that ‘perceived negative impacts to wellbeing’ is the second-highest stated barrier for women considering police careers.
- **Lack of support to police officers as parents and carers:** One respondent linked this to remote postings and working away from home and family, which make it harder to combine a police career with caring responsibilities.

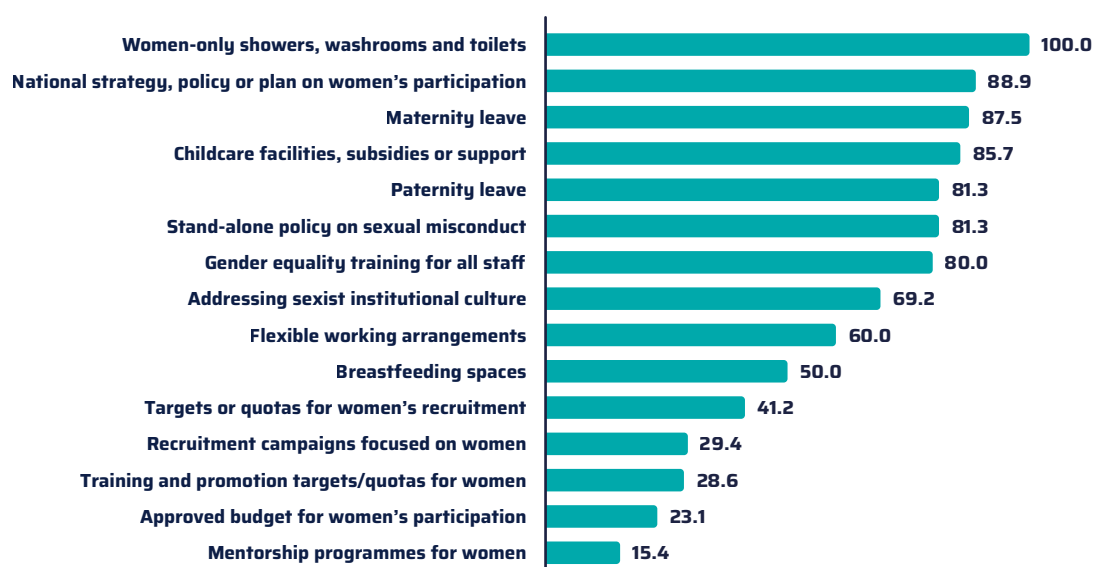
- **Societal perceptions that women should not be police officers:** One respondent explained that the nature of the work – border security, counter-insurgency, disaster management – ‘creates a stereotype societal perception that it is a male domain career even more than regular policing’.

Good Practices to Overcome Barriers

The most frequently reported measures to support women’s participation fall into three groups: equipment and adaptation of physical infrastructure for female staff (uniforms, accommodation, and women-only bathrooms and changing rooms), measures to support families (maternity and/or paternity leave and childcare facilities or support), and measures aimed at institutional change – policy or strategy on women’s participation, gender equality training for staff, or policy or investigation measures on sexual misconduct. See Figure 8.

Figure 8. Selected measures to support women’s participation in policing

Percentage of responding institutions reporting each individual measure



Good practices in action

Latvia: Fifty-three per cent of Latvia's police personnel are women, following an increase of 15.4 percentage points over the past decade. This achievement is supported by a comprehensive institutional framework, including dedicated gender equality legislation, policies, and a National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, as well as measures promoting equal opportunities in recruitment, career development, and working conditions. Gender-responsive reforms are further reinforced through mandatory gender equality training, mentoring programmes, and the presence of a women police officers' network, helping to foster an inclusive organizational culture and sustain progress towards gender equality within the service.

Zambia: Women currently account for 32% of Zambia's police personnel, supported by a range of institutional measures aimed at promoting gender equality and career advancement. These include leadership training programmes, mentorship and coaching initiatives, and aiming for 50/50 women and men in recruitment, training, and promotion opportunities. Zambia has also introduced measures to improve retention and progression, including maternity and paternity leave, adapted uniforms and equipment, women's networks, and the creation of dedicated positions to advance gender equality objectives. Efforts to expand women's participation in peacekeeping operations have contributed to increasing women's visibility and representation in leadership and operational roles.



Institutional Shortcomings and Opportunities Identified

Several more specific patterns can be observed within the police institutions' data that highlight opportunities to improve:

- Only 35% of reporting Member States had conducted an assessment to identify obstacles to women's participation in policing (e.g. in recruitment, retention, and/or promotion) since 2014.
- Ninety-four per cent of reporting Member States said that discrimination against personnel on the basis of sex within the police is constitutionally or legislatively prohibited. A total of 89% of reporting Member States said they had a national strategy, policy, or plan containing provisions on enhancing women's participation in police services. However, of these police services with a strategy, policy, or plan towards women's participation, only 56% had in place a dedicated budget and/or mechanism such as gender equality advisers, gender focal points, or a gender unit or office to support women's participation. This illustrates a policy commitment to gender equality but without the internal structures and resources to implement it.
- On institutional frameworks to address sexual harassment, abuse, exploitation, or other forms of sexual misconduct, 81% of institutions providing data reported a stand-alone policy and specialist investigators, and 79% reported confidential survivor support services. However, only 56% reported mandatory training on sexual misconduct, and only 33% reported all four elements in place. As such, in the majority of police institutions, the implementation framework to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct remains partial.
- Retention measures (including maternity/paternity leave, childcare support, and flexible working) are more commonly implemented than are proactive recruitment measures. For example, only 41% of institutions said they had targets or quotas for women's recruitment, and only 29% employed recruitment campaigns targeting women. This may be indicative of an institutional preference for skill retention and reducing turnover among existing cohorts of female personnel, but it may also indicate that the majority of police institutions have yet to invest in actively widening the pipeline of women entering the institution.
- Only 47% of police institutions that responded had in place measures to support promotion and leadership pathways for women, most commonly strategies to increase the participation of female police officers in peacekeeping. Mentorship programmes for women, targets or quotas for women's access to advanced training and promotion, or mechanisms to open new positions, career paths, and opportunities for women were rare.
- While there is evidence of gendered functional segregation in policing – most obviously in the preponderance of women in violence-against-women units and their scarcity in rapid response units – women are represented above average in anti-corruption, environmental crime and drug enforcement units. This challenges the widespread belief that women tend to be limited only to 'softer' policing roles, and suggests opportunities to learn from women's integration into these functions.

Corrections

Key Data Points: Women's Participation

How has women's representation evolved (2014–2024)?

In 2024, across 15 countries, women's representation in corrections ranged from 9% to 52%, with an average of 27.4%. The majority of institutions stated that their personnel comprised between 13% and 41% of women.

Among the 11 Member State corrections institutions that provided data for both 2014 and 2024, all but one reported an increase in women's representation, with an average gain of 5.7 percentage points. In 2024, the average female representation in corrections among these 11 countries stood at 29.3%, up from 23.6% in 2014. *See Figure 9.*

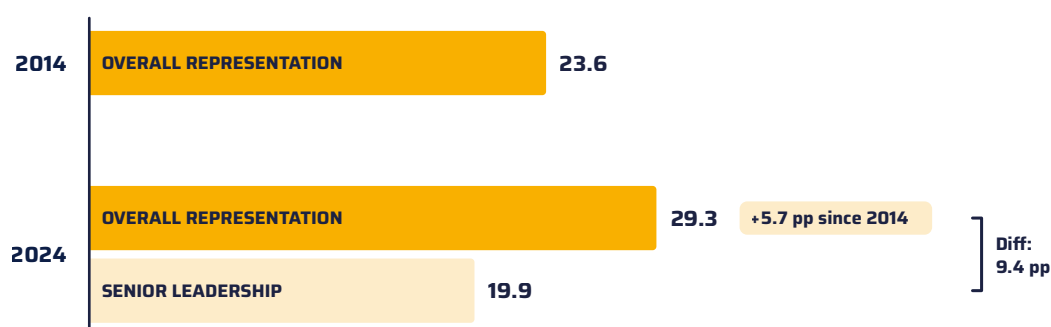
Are women equally represented at leadership levels?

Of ten Member State corrections institutions providing seniority-disaggregated data for 2024, a 7.5 percentage-point women's leadership gap is evident. In senior leadership roles, the average women's share is 19.9%, compared with the sector-wide average of 27.4%.

This data should be interpreted cautiously in light of wide spreads. For example, one Baltic nation reported the percentage for female employees in corrections as 41%, but only 6% in senior leadership; while one Mediterranean country reported the percentage for female employees in corrections as only 16%, but 73.8% in senior leadership. Three nations reported percentages of less than 2% for women in senior leadership roles.

Figure 9. Women's participation and senior leadership in corrections, 2014 and 2024

Average reported shares of women in overall personnel and senior leadership positions, %



How does women's representation vary by function?

The corrections data reveals clear role segregation, consistent with 'gendered' institutional patterns. Responses from 14 Member State corrections systems indicated women were most prevalent in prisoner welfare roles, ranging from 20% to 85%, averaging 48.9%; in medical roles, the percentage ranged from 11% to 100%, averaging 48.4%; and in prison administration, the percentage ranged from 1% to 82%, averaging 44.2%.

Women were most starkly under-represented in prison security, between 7% and 43%, with an average of 22.2%.

Barriers to Equal Opportunities

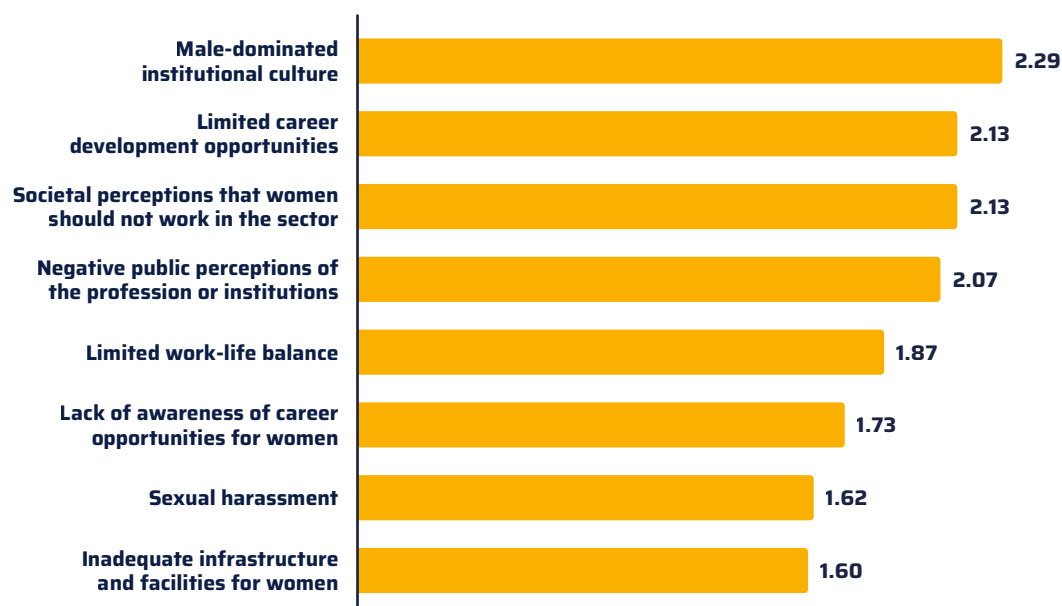
Of 16 Member State respondents to the survey on corrections, 14 provided data on perceived barriers to women's participation. *See Figure 10.*

The most commonly cited moderate-to-very-high barriers are:

- **Male-dominated institutional culture:** This barrier had the highest severity rating in corrections.
- **Limited career development opportunities:** One respondent provided a specific structural insight: legal provisions impose gender distinction in recruitment to basic ranks of the Penitentiary Police and in promotion to the rank of Sergeant – a formal legal barrier to equal opportunities that goes beyond culture or perception. Another reported that women find it difficult to gain internal promotion to leadership posts in its surveillance and security corps.

Figure 10. Reported barriers to women's participation in corrections

Average institutional ratings, from 1 (not a barrier) to 5 (very high)



- **Societal perceptions that women should not work in prisons:** One respondent described a 'limited number of female applicants due to the perception that correctional work is mainly a male profession' and a 'lack of awareness among women about career opportunities in correctional services'.
- **Negative public perceptions of corrections officers:** Six of 15 respondents rated this barrier as moderate or higher.
- **Limited work-life balance:** Respondents cited this barrier particularly in the case of staff working night shifts or rotating duties.

Good Practices to Overcome Barriers

The most frequently reported measures to support women's participation fall into two groups: uniforms and adaptation of physical infrastructure for female staff (women-only bathrooms and changing rooms) and measures to support families (maternity and paternity leave). *See Figure 11.*

Figure 11. Selected measures to support women's participation in corrections

Percentage of responding institutions reporting each individual measure



Good practices in action

Chile: Chile's correctional services integrate gender equality principles into their institutional People Management and Development Policy, which promotes equal opportunities, addresses gender bias in recruitment and career development processes, and includes measures to prevent workplace harassment and gender-based violence. The institution has also undertaken a barrier assessment, drawing on focus groups and workforce data to identify gender-related obstacles and biases, thereby providing an evidence base for targeted interventions. These efforts are complemented by gender equality training for personnel and reinforced by specific equipment and infrastructure for women (uniforms, accommodation, showers/toilets, changing rooms) and broader legislative measures aimed at preventing workplace violence and harassment.

Algeria: While women currently represent 13% of corrections personnel, a range of targeted measures have been introduced to support their recruitment, retention, and professional development. These include structured mentorship programmes for newly recruited women, pairing them with experienced staff to facilitate professional development and integration. Algeria has also introduced budget allocations for the recruitment of women, helping to expand women's representation in the sector. In addition, women-only facilities; adapted equipment; flexible working arrangements, including extended maternity leave; family-related leave provision, and breastfeeding accommodations support the retention of women personnel by promoting a better balance between professional and family responsibilities.



Institutional Shortcomings and Opportunities

- Only 27% of reporting Member States had conducted an assessment to identify obstacles to women's participation in corrections (e.g. in recruitment, retention, and/or promotion) since 2014.
- Ninety-four per cent of reporting Member States stated that discrimination against personnel on the basis of sex within corrections and prisons is constitutionally or legislatively prohibited. But only 36% of reporting Member States said they had a national strategy, policy, or plan containing provisions on enhancing women's participation in corrections services. Of the five Member States with such a strategy, policy, or plan for their corrections service, only three had conducted a barrier assessment, and only three had in place a supporting mechanism such as gender equality advisers, gender focal points, a gender unit or office, or a dedicated budget to support women's participation. This illustrates policy commitment to gender equality without the internal structures and resources to implement it.
- On institutional frameworks to address sexual harassment, abuse, exploitation and/or other forms of sexual misconduct: of 14 respondents, 50% noted a stand-alone sexual harassment policy; 43%, specialist investigators; 36%, mandatory training; and 57%, confidential survivor support. Only three Member States reported all four elements; five reported none of these.
- While retention measures (maternity/paternity leave, flexible working) are commonly implemented, only 15% of corrections services reported any proactive recruitment and entry measures for women such as targets, prior physical training, financial incentives, or campaigns. This suggests many corrections institutions would benefit from actively widening the entry measures for women.
- Functional role segregation maps upon a pattern of 'softer' caring roles in welfare and medicine, associated with femininity, being more commonly for women, and 'hard' security and command roles, associated with masculinity, being more often held by men. Additionally, only 14% of Member States that responded reported having mentorship programmes, targets or quotas for women's access to advanced training and promotion, or mechanisms to introduce new positions, career paths, and opportunities for women. Only 21% had in place measures to support women's promotion and leadership pathways; most commonly, a strategy to increase women's participation in peacekeeping. This is a clear gap, given that limited career development opportunities are identified as a key barrier for women.
- Although male-dominated institutional culture is identified as a key barrier, only half of respondents indicated measures in place targeting sexist institutional culture.

Justice

Key Data Points: Women’s Participation

How has women’s representation evolved (2014–2024)?

In 2024, among 13 Member States providing data on women in the justice system, women’s representation ranged from 15% to 77.8%, averaging 51.6%; the majority of respondents reported that justice personnel comprised 42% to 63% of women.

Among the ten Member States providing data for the justice sector for both 2014 and 2024, an average gain of 3.8 percentage points emerges.

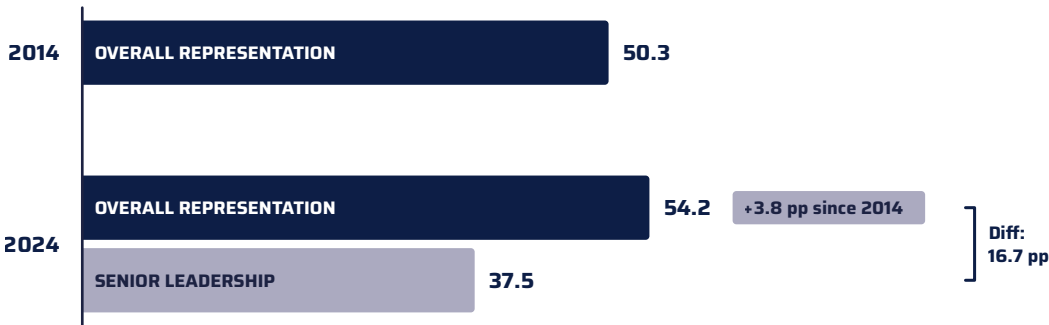
Only two nations reported a decline in representation; one at a rate of over 10 percentage points.

Among these 10 nations, the average share of women in the justice sector in 2024 stands at 54.2%, up from 50.3% in 2014. *See Figure 12.*

Data was provided, for example, about first-instance courts; appeal and supreme courts within the state justice system; the Court Administration, State Attorney’s Office and Ministry of Justice; and the Supreme Judicial Council.

Figure 12. Women’s participation and senior leadership in the justice sector, 2014 and 2024

Average reported shares of women in overall personnel and senior leadership positions, %



Are women equally represented at leadership levels?

Of 12 Member State justice institutions providing seniority-disaggregated data for 2024, a 14.1 percentage-point women’s leadership gap is evident.

In senior leadership roles, the average women’s share is 37.5%, compared with a sector-wide average of 51.6%. Only one nation reported a higher proportion of women in leadership roles than in the justice sector overall. Among others, the women’s leadership gap ranged from 4.7 to 59.6 percentage points.

How does women’s representation vary by function?

The justice sector showed less occupational segregation by role than police and corrections institutions did. Among 12 Member States

that provided data for 2024, on average 57.4% of administrative staff were women; 50.1%, judges and magistrates; and 49.6%, prosecutors.

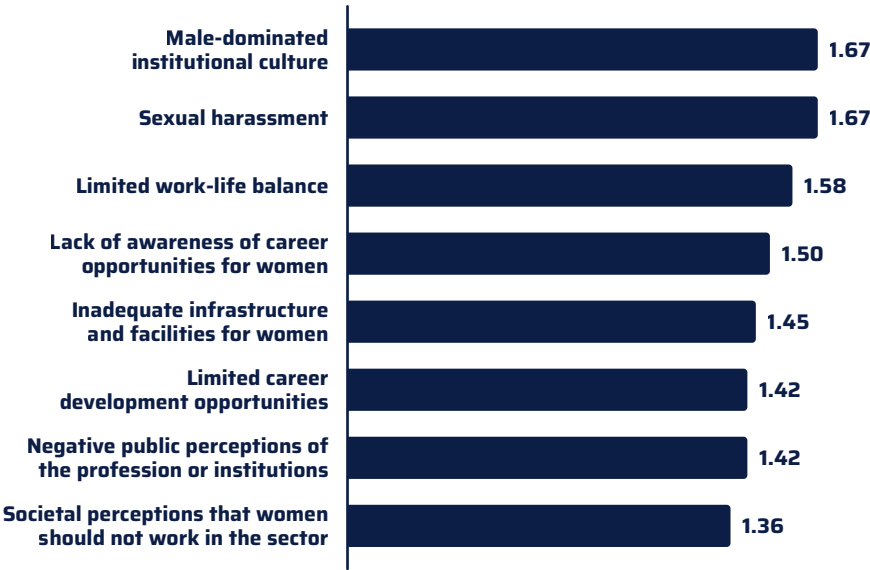
The majority of respondents reported figures of more than 50% for female prosecutors, judges, and magistrates.

Barriers to Equal Opportunities

The justice sector presents a distinctive barrier profile. Of 12 Member States that responded on barriers, 9 rated barrier severity as low overall, with an average score of 1.5 (the lowest among all sectors). *See Figure 13.*

Figure 13. Reported barriers to women’s participation in the justice sector

Average institutional ratings, from 1 (not a barrier) to 5 (very high)



Those barriers rated most severe shared some commonalities with other sectors but also included some distinctive barriers:

- **Male-dominated workplace culture:** One respondent’s comments provided details of how this works in practice, reporting that women have fewer opportunities for promotion to senior judicial posts because of a perception that men are easier to manage.
- **Work-life balance:** A 2025 study cited by one respondent found that approximately 65% of judges who were surveyed identified workload and difficulties in reconciling professional, personal and family responsibilities as the main obstacles to accessing senior judicial positions – a finding that connects the data on barriers directly to the glass ceiling.

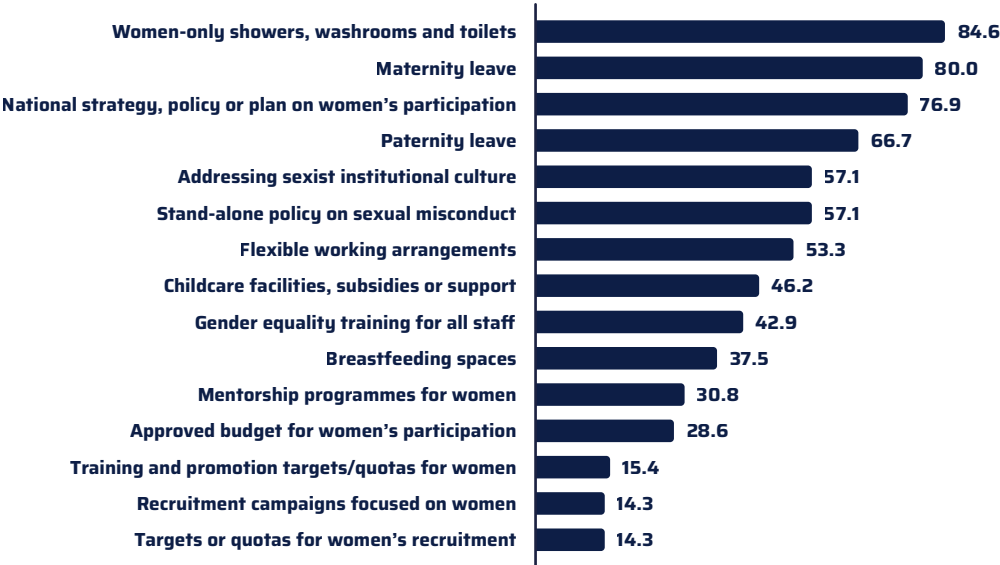
- **Sexual harassment:** Two respondents rated this as moderate or higher, one of them very high.
- **High caseload:** Two respondents rated high caseload as a high or very high barrier.
- **Lack of mentoring:** Without formal women-specific mentoring, some justice institutions rely instead on equality officers and professional women’s networks.

Good Practices to Overcome Barriers

The most frequently reported measures to support women’s participation were measures to support families (maternity and paternity leave, childcare facilities, subsidies, or childcare support), providing physical infrastructure for female staff (women-only bathrooms and changing rooms), flexible working arrangements, and addressing sexist institutional culture. *See Figure 14.*

Figure 14. Selected measures to support women’s participation in the justice sector

Percentage of responding institutions reporting each individual measure



Good practices in action

Guatemala's good practices include the provision of a childcare financial benefit for employees with children under the age of seven, an active Association of Women Judges promoting women judges' professional development and participation, and dedicated gender institutional mechanisms, including a Secretariat for Women and Gender Analysis. The judiciary has institutionalized both initial and continuous training on gender equality and women's rights for all personnel through the School of Judicial Studies. These measures are complemented by gender-responsive career development pathways, which integrate equality considerations into new positions and professional advancement opportunities, as well as initiatives to address sexist institutional culture through awareness campaigns, gender training, and the implementation of protocols to prevent and respond to sexual and workplace harassment.

Kuwait is advancing women's participation in the justice sector through a combination of leadership programmes to strengthen women's skills and prepare them for greater responsibility, professional advancement opportunities, and institutional support. Professional development opportunities for women have included international training and judicial exchange initiatives. At the same time, new professional roles and career pathways have been opened up to women, including appointments to senior legal advisory and international cooperation roles. These efforts have been further reinforced through women's networking and capacity-building initiatives, creating opportunities for peer support, mentoring, and continued professional growth.

Spain: Women currently represent 62% of Spain's justice sector personnel, supported by a combination of measures that address both structural and practical barriers to participation. The General Council of the Judiciary's Equality Commission and Plan promote gender-sensitive practices through equality training, non-sexist language guidelines, and systematic efforts to identify barriers affecting women's career progression. This is complemented by evidence-based analysis, including a study examining the causes of women's low participation in discretionary judicial appointments. Spain also tackles socioeconomic obstacles through the SERÉ Scholarship Programme, which supports candidates preparing for judicial and prosecutorial examinations and helps broaden access to these careers. In addition, work-life balance is promoted through childcare and family-support measures, including childcare facilities in newly developed Justice City complexes and a range of family-related benefits.

Institutional Shortcomings and Opportunities

- Ninety-three per cent of reporting Member States stated that discrimination against personnel on the basis of sex within justice institutions is constitutionally or legislatively prohibited. Seventy-seven per cent of reporting Member States said they had a national strategy, policy, or plan containing provisions on enhancing women's participation as staff in justice institutions.
- A total of 42% have conducted an assessment of obstacles to women's participation since 2014.
- Of those ten Member States with a national strategy, policy, or plan containing provisions on enhancing women's participation, only half had conducted a barrier assessment since 2014, and only three had in place a supporting mechanism such as gender equality advisers, gender focal points, a gender unit or office, or a dedicated budget to support women's participation.

- Of 14 respondents – on institutional frameworks to address sexual harassment, abuse, exploitation, and/or other forms of sexual misconduct – 57% report a stand-alone sexual harassment policy, 38% report specialist investigators, 21% report mandatory training, and 50% report confidential survivor support. Only two respondents reported having all four elements of effective prevention and response in place. In light of sexual harassment being identified as a barrier to women in the justice sector, this should be a clear priority for improvement.
- Although male-dominated institutional culture is identified as a key barrier, only 57% of respondents indicated they had any measures in place targeting sexist institutional culture.
- While work-life balance and high caseloads are seen as barriers to women, only 53% of respondents reported any flexible working measures – which could help address such barriers.
- The data shows women in the justice sector facing the largest leadership gap, in terms of attaining the highest positions in the judiciary, prosecution service, and administration. A consistent 'glass ceiling' pattern is visible. Yet only 31% of responding institutions had in place measures to create new career paths for women or mentorship programmes. Associations of women judges were noted by several respondents, one of which credited its association with building the capacity of women judges.



Methodology and limitations

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through bespoke surveys disseminated to all UN Member States in early 2026, with a submission deadline of 21 August 2026. Surveys were available in English, French, and Spanish, with technical support sessions in the six UN languages. Submission was carried out via an online platform or directly via email, where the questionnaires were completed in Word format and sent to the UN for processing. Respondents were asked to submit responses only in English.

Surveys could only be submitted to the online platform by individuals with access to a secure link. This included a multi-stage verification system, and each survey link was geo-restricted to the intended country to prevent accidental or malicious submissions on behalf of another state.

The DCAF and UN staff working on this study undertook data cleaning measures to ensure that as many Member States' responses as possible could be included in this study, even where they were submitted in a slightly irregular format. Raw data files documenting this data handling process are available on request.

Interpretation and Limitations

This report represents the first phase of the development of the UN Portal on Women in Justice and Security. A total of 15 to 19 responses were received per survey. Averages reported are derived from means of country percentages, not shares of total personnel. Sample sizes vary by indicator, including the leadership-gap comparison.

Given the relatively small number, the findings presented in this paper are intended to be indicative, not globally representative, and the conclusions drawn are preliminary. Three weaknesses in the data should be noted.

Firstly, not all respondents answered all questions. Historical data for the years 2014 and 2019 are missing for several respondents. Seniority, function, and role data were also under-reported. Secondly – unavoidably given the wide variety of national structures pertaining to the security and justice sector – the dataset contains data from a mix of federal and non-federal systems. This makes it difficult, and potentially misleading, to directly compare results between countries, especially as a federal/centralized police, justice or corrections structure might be relatively small. Additionally, some Member States could not provide all relevant data within the constraints of the survey. For example, one Member State noted that some of their police personnel are non-binary. Following the approach of other UN data collection tools, the surveys asked for information only on men and women and had no way of counting non-binary personnel.

It is likely that some Member States faced technical and linguistic barriers to providing data. Eastern Africa, East Asia, North America, and the Pacific are under-represented in the data received.

As a more cross-cutting observation on this type of research, which relies upon institutional self-assessment, future iterations would ideally triangulate the data received with data sourced directly from women and men serving within these institutions and data from other independent sources, such as oversight and inspection bodies.

Despite these constraints, the dataset represents a pioneering first effort to consolidate global Member State qualitative and quantitative data on women's participation across police, justice and corrections institutions, and provides a credible baseline for future monitoring and evidence-based reform.



Next steps: engaging with the UN Portal

➤ UNBPSO and DCAF are working to make this data, and its future iterations, available to all online, via the UN Portal on Women in Justice and Security.

The Portal's value as a global evidence base will grow with every Member State that takes part.

Member States are invited to:

- complete the police, justice, corrections, military justice, and mine action surveys, if they have not yet done so;
- draw on Portal data when developing national policies, WPS national action plans, and security sector reform programmes; and
- share their experience and good practices with other Member States and with regional and subregional organizations.



#WomenPortal #WomeninJustice #WomeninSecurity