

## Women in Policing in the Federal Republic of Germany

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### **Abstract**

Germany has taken significant steps to make certain that the state and national law enforcement agencies have female police personnel assigned to all ranks and responsibilities. Although there were initial challenges, Germany can be called a remarkable success in establishing protocols and legislation to promote the hiring of not only females, but members of all minority and ethnic groups, into government and criminal justice agencies. The history of these noteworthy developments will be thoroughly outlined.

**Keywords:** Women in policing; Germany; affirmative action

### **Introduction**

The Federal Republic of Germany is a federation of sixteen states and each of these is responsible for its own internal affairs. Therefore all police matters are basically dealt with by the police of the individual states or “Länder.” Within each state, the Interior Minister or Interior Senator is responsible for the supervision of the state police agencies.

The Federal Government does however have some responsibilities for policing the country. The Federal Minister of the Interior supervises the German Federal Police (previously called the Federal Border Guard), the Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation, and the Police Officers assigned to the security of the Federal Parliament. The Federal Police (“Bundespolizei”) was originally organized along paramilitary lines and was basically responsible for border security to the former East Germany and other countries (prior to the development of the European Union), at airports, and on railroads. In recent years, this police agency has been changed into a modern Federal Police and is playing an increasingly important role in internal security. It may also be deployed with federal authorization throughout the Federal Republic in cases of disaster, disturbances and other crisis. Federal Customs Officers and the Federal Customs Department Investigation Branch are under the jurisdiction of the Federal Minister of Finance.

The Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation (Bundeskriminalamt) has as its primary function the collation, evaluation, and distribution of information and intelligence between the State (“Länder”) Offices of Criminal Investigation (Landeskriminalämter) and acts as a Central Criminal Records Office. Although the individual states are responsible for their police matters and are normally independent of the federal government in respect to its internal police affairs, the Federal Minister of the Interior may in times of emergency or crisis assume control of the police of one or more other states in an effort to assist the states directly affected.

The state police agencies, for instance, all had different uniforms until 1976, when a standard uniform was introduced for the whole country, which became mandatory for all police officers by 1980. In 1990, after the unification of East and West Germany, the police in the five new eastern states of Germany adopted the standard uniform as well. The only difference is now the state emblem on front of the hat and on the left sleeve. Some slightly different rank insignias had also been used.

The state of Northern Rhine Westphalia is the biggest German state by population (approximately 19 million residents) and therefore has the highest number of police officers with about 41,000. Unfortunately, after reunification with former East Germany, the unified policing system with its benefits of a standard salary, pension, rank and uniform scheme is no longer in place.

### **The History of Women in Law Enforcement in Germany**

As for the history of women in policing in Germany, the first female police assistant was Henriette Arendt, who was appointed in February 1903 in the city of Stuttgart in the state of Baden Württemberg. Now in 2012 in the state of Northern Rhine Westphalia, female officers make up 20% of all ranks, 10% of senior management positions, and 38% in training at the police school.

The so called “feminization” of the German police is an ongoing process with far reaching consequences. This clearly has been a dramatic change for middle class women. The image of women through the 1970s required females to marry, to support their husbands, and to care for the children. However, the number of women who did not want to be dependent on their husbands had increased and this put pressure on government authorities to open civil servant positions to females.

Around 1913<sup>1</sup> more female police assistants had been employed in 19 German cities. However, they were not treated equally to their male colleagues and were only tasked to care for children and juveniles or to investigate women and girls suspected of prostitution. During World War I, women were used to guard their nation’s morals as women became controllers of other women’s sexual conduct across the European continent. The factors affecting the hiring of women and the limitations on their duties and numbers found in the United States also were characteristic of the European countries. They too were influenced by broader movements such as international feminism and the human rights movement<sup>2</sup> (J. M. Brown & Heidensohn, 1996). During the 1920s, females were assigned in police uniforms. During the British occupation after World War I, venereal diseases had sharply increased. The British military administration therefore ordered a stronger supervision of prostitutes. The first “female welfare police” was introduced, made of British and German female police officers, who jointly patrolled the streets of Köln in Northern Rhine

Westphalia and processed the arrested prostitutes. However, after the withdrawal of the British military occupation, the female police component was dissolved for budgetary reasons.

Around 1926, the “Female Crime Police” was introduced but restricted to care for children and juveniles or to investigate women and girls suspected of prostitution. After 1945, the British military administration again supported the policy to open up positions for female police officers with little success. However, in 1950 in most German states, female uniformed police officers were integrated into the female crime police. In the 1960s, the female crime police officers more closely resembled the dark clad neighborhood grandmother than an active police officer.

In the 1970s, the situation changed drastically. Around 1970, the female crime police was dissolved and the female police officers there rotated to normal criminal investigation units where they were to work on an equal basis with their male colleagues. However this was not an easy transition as many of the police matrons did not possess a solid police education and had been used more as social workers than as police officers. The situation quickly evolved. The German government’s decision to increase the number of police officers, to reluctantly pay them better wages, and to create more promotional opportunities showed rapid results. Until the early 1970s, it was standard practice that a criminal investigation unit, even a murder squad, was managed by capable sergeants. With the push for advanced education, first young police lieutenants arrived and took over, pushing sergeants into the second line. This provided the opportunity for newly graduated female police lieutenants to earn positions supervising criminal investigation units. (It should be noted that today a criminal investigation unit commander is a senior captain).

The Northern Rhine Westphalia police at that time had a three tier hierarchy which requested every police officer to start as a patrol officer and make their way up through the rank and file. Promotion was given on performance merits and sometimes on a mixed performance/seniority system within the particular tier. The majority of police officers, about 75 %, remained their entire career in the basic tier and filled the ranks of patrol officer to sergeant. Applicants for the lieutenant to captain ranks had to exhibit superior performance, to pass a rigid assessment center exam, and then successfully complete a two year course at the state police college. For the top executive positions, which includes only 1.5 % of the police population, an even more rigid assessment center test was conducted which was followed by another two years of study at the federal police management academy, in order to obtain the ranks of major to colonel.

The new priority was to employ more female officers and investigators and to provide them with advanced education and training opportunities. Since law enforcement agencies were also competing with the private sector to hire and retain female candidates, the state police agencies therefore had to offer something more than just a career in the basic tier of the police. “Lateral entry” became the favorite new term and the new paradigm to achieve that goal. Capable female police officers were employed immediately in the second tier and sent to the police college in order for them to take the lieutenants exam. This was not met with joy by most of their male colleagues because it meant limited career opportunities for those from the basic tier or, at the least, longer waiting periods for promotion.

This was only the beginning. In 1974, the state governments issued decrees in an attempt to raise the number of females in supervisory positions in public service organizations. The main components of these decrees included:

- Female applicants with qualifications and performance assessments equal to men would be given priority in promotion,
- Protection of their position for up to 3 years of absence after child birth and during child rearing, and
- Promotion of female candidates even during unpaid maternity leave.

These promotional practices raised anger among male government employees. Some argued that this would result in reverse discrimination and sued the government. They frequently lost their cases. Some went even up to the state constitutional courts, but were lost as well. The courts’ position was made clear. As long as females did not hold the same number of supervisory positions as they should have in relation to the manpower ratios present between male and female employees, so long would the court consider the government’s decision was in line with the German constitution.

Another line of defense sought to disqualify the promoted female candidates. Only in a few limited cases did male applicants prove that their female competitors were wrongfully rated and promoted. Within a few years, women represented 20 % of the detective staff and continued to make their way up the career ladder. At times, the wrong woman was selected for a supervisory position, as has happened with men as well. Sometimes, females had to be talked into applying for a position, and occasionally they bluntly refused because they had other priorities. During the 1970s and 1980s, female detectives worked in every unit and performed very well. This success influenced further ideas to employ and promote females. There was also

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pressure from human rights advocates and from female organizations who pointed to an article in the German constitution that demanded equal opportunities and prohibited discrimination. Slowly and after long discussion at the end of the 1970s, some German states opened their ranks of patrol officers to females. The state of Nordrhein-Westfalen was one of the last to transition females from criminal investigation assignments and allow them to perform routine patrol duties.

Unfortunately, this move occurred too quickly without considering that there were no female locker rooms and bathrooms in the police stations. The larger challenge was convincing the male patrol colleagues that a female could handle the physical demands of police field work. Many male police officers posed some sensitive questions. How can a small female in uniform speak up to a stocky criminal? How can she outrun and arrest a fleeing, fighting suspect? How can she support and back up her colleagues? Eventually the answers to these questions became clear. The new young females had been well trained and just did their job. And women were found to bring in additional qualities. Their sheer presence changed the tone, the language and habits in police units for the better. And they continued to deal appropriately with females and children. In addition, their ability to calm people at crime scenes or traffic accidents came in handy. Eventually pre-existing prejudices and biases declined over time.

The police training system was also revised. Police schools had not initially been adaptable to the needs of females and also were not cognizant of modern educational trends. The states now require civil servants to obtain university level education. Consequently, regional universities of applied sciences were founded, where police officers received their academic education together with members of other civil service branches. This academic training was supplemented with practical measures received at police stations, at regional headquarters, and at police training centers. Now during their introductory studies, police students are on probation and are paid a reasonable salary. Police students no longer live in dormitories and travel home daily after their studies.

In October 1989, the decree for affirmative action in the hiring of females was revised into the “Women’s Promotional Law for Public Service Organizations,” but did not change in practice. Ten years later in November 1999, the “Law for the Equality of Men and Women in Public Service Agencies in the state of Northern Rhine Westphalia” was introduced, which outlined the mandate to promote the clearly better qualified candidate.

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## Summary and Conclusion

Today throughout Germany it is not uncommon to see two female officers in a patrol vehicle, unquestionably performing the same job responsibilities as their male counterparts. It is also noticeable that many female university students perform academically better than their male colleagues.

As a result of all of these initiatives, the number of females has steadily been increasing and the law enforcement profession continues to be appealing to women applicants. In 2010,<sup>3</sup> females make up about 38 % of entry level police college students, around 19 % of police officers in police stations, and 10 % of supervisory police positions in the state of Northern Rhine Westphalia. In order to maintain higher levels of female police officers, government officials have introduced a variety of benefits as it relates to maternity leave and child rearing, and some options include part time work, work from home, and total leave with slightly diminished salary.

In conclusion, it can generally be said that today female police officers are treated equally within the Northern Rhine Westphalia state police, in all state police agencies, and in the German Federal Police. They receive the same salary and benefits, have the same career opportunities, and undertake the same responsibilities. They also have to take the same risks. Nationwide, of the approximate 270,000 police officers employed in Germany, each year about 12 police officers are killed in the line of duty.<sup>4</sup> About 60 % of them are killed in traffic accident situations and 40 % during encounters with criminals. And 20 % of police officers killed each year are female, which roughly reflects their percentage in the total police community in Germany.

## References

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<sup>2</sup> J. M. Brown & Heidensohn (1996).

<sup>3</sup> Deutsche Polizeigewerkschaft (German Police Union) 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Data collected by the Federal Police University in Muenster, Germany.

## About the Author

Friedrich Schwindt is a retired police chief in the Northern Rhine Westphalia (Germany) State Police Department.