

# Pandemic Effects on Law Enforcement Training and Practice —

## Introduction to conference findings and perspectives

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### Under peculiar circumstances

Since its beginnings, the CEPOL Research & Science Conferences<sup>1</sup> aim to provide a stimulating European platform for a cross-professional, cross-disciplinary exchange of research findings and perspectives for inquisitive law enforcement practitioners, educators and academic scholars. The latest instance in the line of those regular events had been for a longer while the conference on “Innovations in Law Enforcement – Implications for practice, education and civil society”, organised in late autumn 2017 in Budapest<sup>2</sup>. Since, a succession of unfavourable circumstances had hampered the realisation of the next rendition of the CEPOL conference. The major cause for the longer hiatus is, of course, to be attributed to the rise of the Corona-virus in winter 2019/20 and its fast spread around the globe.

It is an irrefutable fact that the ensuing pandemic has had a dramatic effect not only on the daily routines of citizens and societies in general, but specifically on the work of police and other law enforcement bodies and officials. As disruption hit manifold areas of social and

business-life, those put in charge of upholding the law and security had to constantly adapt their institutional resources and practices to new and repeatedly changing regulations introduced to curb the spread of the pandemic disease. The policing of curfew orders, “social distancing” rules, or the compliance with the obligatory wearing of face-masks have become unfamiliar areas for law enforcement attention and were raised as a topic of public concern and debate in many European countries. At the very time when police and other law enforcement bodies had to quickly restructure and re-configure their resources in reaction to a rapidly evolving public health emergency, the opportunity structures for a broad spectrum of criminal offences changed as well and became even more inviting for deviant profiteers.

When the Call for Papers for the CEPOL Research & Science Conference went out in early 2021, the pandemic crisis had already been a challenging new reality for law enforcement bodies and officials across Europe in varying and fluctuating degrees for almost a full year. Decisions had had to be taken, experiences had been made institutionally, collectively and on the individual officer’s level, and (first) lessons might have been learned on policing and enforcing the law during two pandemic waves. In parallel, researchers and scientists

<sup>1</sup> More about the CEPOL Research & Science Conferences are available at the CEPOL website.

<sup>2</sup> Papers from the Innovation-Conference have been published in the previous Special Conference Edition of the Bulletin, see Nogala et al., 2019.

around the globe had not been idle to collect data and to offer first analyses of the developing pandemic situation and its ramifications<sup>3</sup>.

Concerned specifically with the professional continuous learning of law enforcement officials in Europe and with the transfer of scientific evidence- and research-based insights and findings from the academic to the professional sphere, CEPOL had therefore invited contributions to its conference event, based on empirical studies on a variety of aspects and topics of policing and enforcing the law during the pandemic crisis and beyond, in view of the following topical tracks:

- *Training and Education during and after the Pandemic Crisis*
- *Health & Safety Issues for Law Enforcement Officials*
- *Lessons (to be) learnt for Management and Leadership*
- *Changing Crime Patterns during the COVID-19 Pandemic*
- *Innovation triggered by the Pandemic Crisis*
- *Police-Public Relations and Public Order*
- *Open Corner*

### The Conference

CEPOL Research & Science Conferences have earned over the years a reputation of being one of the rather rare European occasions where law enforcement officials, scholars and academics could discuss, debate, and network in an intellectually stimulating, informal but structured environment. Seasoned conference participants are well aware that apart from listening and learning from presentations, a major positive conference-experience is down to the manifold bi- and multilateral coffee-break-, lunch-, and dinner conversations. Organising such an 'enriching' setting was not justifiably possible under the pandemic-induced regime of travel restrictions and social distancing rules. Hence, the conference had to be implemented as an online-event; not that it would have been the first time for the agency to organise a major event in a digital format<sup>4</sup>, but it occurred as a particular challenge to co-ordinate and implement the organisational efforts on such a scale, open to a wider international audience. Fortunately, the Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), initially foreseen as the hosting institution for the 2020 edition of the conference, enabled with splendid

commitment and added organisational resources the realisation of the event.

Even launched on relatively short notice, the Call for Papers yielded a lush response: more than two-thirds of the overall 89 submitted proposals were accepted by the Programme Board, ranging from invited keynotes to brief "shouts"<sup>5</sup>. All accepted presentations were distributed over the three-day programme schedule according to the most fitting track<sup>6</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, there was high interest in participating by our target audience, evidenced by the hitherto highest number of registrations to a CEPOL conference, obviously facilitated by the online-format. All online-sessions were moderated and supported by members of the CEPOL network of Research & Science Correspondents<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, all presented were invited to submit a full paper of their presentations for publication in the Special Conference Edition of the European Law Enforcement Research Bulletin. Following peer-review by the editors of this issue, thirty papers were received in time and accepted for publication in this conference edition<sup>8</sup>.

### Insights, trends and topical clusters

The articles in this issue cover a wide range of topics associated with effects of the pandemic – and the reader will notice the papers also vary in length, depth and chosen methodological approach. It is the mix of professional and academic scientific perspectives taken, which hopefully makes this collection a worthwhile reading beyond the experience of the online conference in May: A specific European institutional view is provided by authors from **CEPOL**, **Europol** and **Frontex**; a specific national light is shone on experiences in

3 As example for many see Mawby (2020), Frenkel et al. (2021) and the various references of this issue's contributions.

4 For many years, CEPOL has organised trainings and seminars in the format of webinars, and in summer 2020 an access-restricted first one-day online conference with support and participation of CEPOL Member States had been held.

5 The standard contribution was restricted to 20 minutes presentation; as a new element the "Shout", lasting 5-10 minutes, had been introduced, not at least to prevent 'zoom-fatigue' with the audience and as an offer for more concise, opinionated contributions.

6 As often, some presentations touch aspects of various tracks, only assigned to one for organisational needs.

7 The conference programme, abstracts, and speakers' profiles are still available online on the conference website at <https://www.cepoleuropa.eu/science-research/conferences> (2021-online tab).

8 Not all presentations were meant for written publication, and not all authors could deliver in line with a set short deadline. More papers from the conference might appear in subsequent regular issues of the Bulletin.

Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and, beyond EU boundaries, in South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. Moreover, articles cover cyberspace and insights from H2020 research projects – and, remarkably, some offer even insights from a national and international comparative view.

While there are always alternatives in sorting and presenting a collection of articles, the order chosen here tries to identify topical clusters in the variance of contributions which could reveal a feasible tacit logic in the development of the diverse pandemic effects. With some give and take, three main clusters can be identified, relating to pandemic effects on

- crime and deviance;
- managerial and institutional issues;
  - o health and wellbeing
  - o organisational alignment and innovative adaptation
  - o training and learning
- critical perceptions of enforcement policies.

### Pandemic effects: focus on crime and deviance

A collection of papers, dealing with the various effects on law enforcement training and practice, could take off from a variety of angles. A manifest option chosen here is about how the pandemic has affected the very *raison d'être* of law enforcement institutions - the breach and violation of law and regulations, triggering the necessity of an institutional response in modern societies.

In a recent article in the *European Law Enforcement Research Bulletin*, Rob Mawby (2020) had painstakingly reconsidered the impact of the pandemic “rollercoaster” on crime and policing. With reference to mainstream criminological theories, like *routine activity theory* or *rational choice theory*, he acknowledges that the pandemic has significantly altered the opportunity structures for committing crimes successfully, as the pandemic disruption of normal life routines and taken countermeasures would “make a crime more or less likely” –that is, certain criminal behaviour and acts would flourish, while others would be in decline (p. 15, 17). For example, under lockdown, chances for pick-pockets or burglaries would wither, because potential victims would not be out in the streets or in offices, but stay at their homes. In turn, for the same reason, instances of domestic abuse were expected to increase from the outset and deviant acts would move even fur-

ther into cyberspace. As the severity of the pandemic has changed over time, so did the restrictiveness and duration of the measures taken by the governments in order to curb the spread, and, obviously, the exact profile of the pandemic crime-curve will differ between the various European countries. However, early analysis for the year 2020 seems to indicate that there has been a reported general trend of a drop in the crime statistics, mainly due to lockdown effects on typical street crime – in terms of pandemic-induced development of deviance, some observers started to believe they are looking at “the largest criminological experiment in history” (Stickle & Felson 2020), and wonder if the COVID-19 pandemic is a “crisis that changed everything” (Baker 2020).

Insofar crime statistics can reflect (in limitations) social developments over time, they are usually aggregated on national level. For the whole of Europe, comprehensive and timely general crime statistics are not available, but Europol has been delivering trend analyses and reports from the onset of the pandemic crisis, in particular in view of serious and organised crime. Hence, this Special Conference Edition opens with a succinct overview by **Tamara Schotte** and **Mercedes Abdalla** from Europol’s Analysis Unit, outlining the evolution of new and more familiar types of organised crime enterprises during the first Corona-year. Apparently, criminal networks have been quite imaginative in exploiting demands for specific pandemic goods, maximising their criminal profits in times of crises.

Next, three leading European experts explicate in detail the criminogenic effect of the pandemic on specific aspects of the organised crime landscape. Considering fraud as a “Cinderella-area of policing”, University of Cardiff-based professor **Michael Levi** examines the favourable and less favourable conditions the disruption of usual business and life has had so far on deception, scams and counterfeiting, reminding the reader that it is yet not established that there has been a total increase due to the pandemic. Offering a typology of fraud during the reign of COVID, he also has some expert advice on best practice in preventing economic crimes. While the pandemic crisis has been wreaking havoc on various parts of the legitimate economy, it evenly opened up new loopholes for infiltration of businesses by organised crime actors – this is the initial observation of **Michele Riccardi**’s contribution. His paper aims to address the gap between frequently raised alerts by authorities and empirical evidence of infiltration activi-

ties by presenting cases and offering a classification of *modi operandi*, affected business sectors, and types of involved criminal actors. His approach might be more than useful in view of the subsidies to be distributed in the framework of the EU-COVID-recovery programme. Before Corona, “having caught a virus” quite often meant, somebody’s computer had been compromised and has become subject to damage or misuse. The rise of something more sinister and potentially devastating is the subject of **David Wall**’s research-project based report on ransomware attack tactics and changes thereof over the initial period of the pandemic. His contribution demonstrates in detail the emergence of a cybercrime ecosystem where ransomware attacks are organised as a service and can therefore flourish. Interestingly, in his view, the COVID-19 lockdown shall not be seen as transformative for cybercrime, but accelerated already pre-existing trends.

The topic of the development of cybercrimes during the pandemic is continued in the paper by **Iulian Co-man** and **Ioan-Cosmin Mihai**, who present a concise overview of cyberthreats of particular concern for the authorities since the begin of crisis and plea for enhanced training efforts for law enforcement officials.

Increase in cases of domestic abuse and violence has been a matter of anxious public concern from the moment quarantines and lockdowns were imposed on the population in an effort to curb further spread of the disease. Vienna-based researchers **Paul Luca Herbing** and **Norbert Leonhardmeier** take the reader on an enlightening journey of dissecting the gap between widely held expectations of a unified international trend of incidences of domestic violence during the lockdowns does not fit exactly with statistical data collected from four European countries (Austria, Finland, Hungary and Portugal). Their comparative multi-source analysis reveals some discrepancies between the countries and in view of the expected general trend, which are attributed to the variation of how victims made use of support services and how responding institutions changed their modus of intervention in line with the pandemic situation.<sup>9</sup> Considering a necessary differentiation of types of intimate partner violence is proposed as one key to make sense of the heterogeneity of the available data on domestic abuse. Confirmation that deciphering the impact of the pandemic on crime figures is anything but a trivial scientific exercise is the message of the paper by **Gorazd**

**Meško** and **Vojko Urbas** who inform the reader about the measures taken in the first wave and examine thoroughly the crime statistics for the Slovenian case, a country, like others, that “(..) found itself at a crossroads of uncertainty, ignorance, limited information and the search for better solutions”. While cautious about the conclusiveness of their statistical analysis, they as well attribute the variation in crime figures to change of routine activities and subsequently to the alteration of opportunities to commit crimes.

What has become clear from the papers in this section is that the emergence of the Coronavirus has had a significant impact on the structural opportunity to commit certain types of crime – while offenses related with (frequent) spatial-social movement ebbed away due to lockdowns, domestic abuse, and organised forms of fraud and cybercrime found fertile ground. In the next section, papers will reflect on what this extraordinary crisis meant for those who are supposed to keep law and order.<sup>10</sup>

### Pandemic effects: focus on managerial and institutional issues

The second chapter clusters papers that are primarily concerned with empirical descriptions, assessments, and analyses taken from an intra-institutional perspective of police and other law enforcement institutions. Those articles again can be divided into examining three separable levels: a) effects on the individual level of the law enforcements officials, in relation to physical and mental well-being; b) reactions and initiatives to master the crisis on the operative level, as organisation or institution; c) initiatives and innovations with regard to training, education and learning even under difficult circumstances.

### Health and well-being

The work of police and other law enforcements officers at the frontline of society *can* be affected by frequent stressful events, which often lead to higher-than-average work strain levels – there are few occupational hazards that come with the job, such as the risk of being injured or getting killed real – although there are some more deadly professions and the chances really depend on factors like actual task and country of service. Still, having to interact with members of the public, often in close contact, in times where a highly

<sup>9</sup> In this regard, see also the paper of Walklate et al. in the section on managing the impact of the pandemic.

<sup>10</sup> For an account of the COVID-pandemic on a broader systemic effect on the criminal justice system in Europe see Baker (2020) or Nogala (2021).

contagious and potentially deadly new virus is around, adds a significant additional danger to an officer's job. No reliable statistics are yet available for Europe, but figures from the USA, where more active-duty police officers are said to be killed by the Corona-virus than by the 9/11 terror attack and COVID has become the leading cause of death for them (Bump, 2021; Pegues, 2021), indicate that the pandemic is an additional serious occupational health problem. While a Corona-infection has becoming a life-risk for the global population, law enforcement frontline officers, like public health professional, are by job at the higher end of the risk scale.

Four articles in this volume present the results of small- to - midsize research projects which tried to identify and record the health-impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on officers and cadets. As part of a broader research project, **Krunoslav Borovec**, **Sanja Delač Fabris** and **Alića Rosić-Jakupović** have surveyed a sample of almost a thousand Croatian police officers about changes in their work and conduct, triggered by the pandemic emergency. They found that a fifth of the officers had reported moderate or severe symptoms of stress and wish, in consequence, that police management shall become more attentive to stress and burnouts as occupational health risks in major crisis situations. Sweden-based researchers **Teresa Silva** and **Hans O. Löfgren** inquired an even bigger sample (n=1639) of police officers in Portugal about the level of burnout, psychological distress and post-traumatic-syndrome in relation to their exposure to and experience in risk of infection. Curiously, two-thirds of their respondents said they were exposed to COVID-19 in their line of duty. The authors conclude that their research confirmed their initial hypothesis that the pandemic would add an additional load of stress on the officers and this would pose another risk factor for the occurrence mental health issues. While they acknowledge an increased need for supportive measures, police management should not fear for a major health crisis among the workforce. Another research from a Portuguese sample is reported by **Paulo Gomes**, **Rui Pereira**, and **Luis Malheiro**, who looked at the impact of the pandemic on the health and well-being of cadets of their military academy. In comparison to similar previous surveys, they noted a deterioration of the cadets' perceptions of the quality in delivering the education and, also, in the general grade of well-being and emotional health – a finding that was reported to the Command of the academy. **Zsuzanna Borbély** chips in with a result from a smaller scale sample involving police trainees in Hungary.

Asking them about their job-experience from the first wave of the pandemic, she finds that her respondents did not perceive the period as particularly stressful. However as there was no indication of differences in the status of mental health between male and female trainees; however, the female ones reported high levels of physical strain.

### Organisational alignment and innovative adaptation

The chapter opens with a succinct summary of the challenges the COVID-19 crisis posed for law enforcement bodies and their leadership across Europe, written from the Europol perspective by **Julia Viedma** and **Mercedes Abdalla**. Their article notes the sudden demands and emerging stressors thrown up by the pandemic crisis, in particular the hampering of cross-border cooperation and concludes with the noteworthy insight that this pandemic shall not be longer seen as an emergency, as it will leave a long-lasting impression on the development of crime and policing in Europe. Based on their explorative pioneer international research, including survey data from senior executives from fifteen European countries, **Peter Neyroud**, **Jon Maskály**, and **Sanja Kutnjak Ivkovic** have teamed up to present results from their comparative study about organisational changes triggered by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking a look into the “rear-view mirror”, they found that police forces were immediately thrown into crisis mode as they had to quickly find a balance between the need for self-protection and the continuation of service-delivery. The figures they can present reveal first-hand indications about absolute changes in policing domains (more or less), the valence, and the anticipated consequences of those changes. To no big surprise, frontline policing – both in reactive and preventive style – has been found to be disrupted significantly (in contrast to internal processes) in the pandemic crisis; However, according to their figures, police administrators in the majority would think that the service quality of policing would not suffer in future, or would even improve as an outcome of the crisis.<sup>11</sup> Interviewing a small sample of German police officers, **Jonas Grutzpalk**, **Stephanos Anastasiadis**, and **Jens Bergmann** are painting in their short paper a slightly less optimistic picture of the capacity of police organisations to learn the necessary lessons from the crisis. Introducing the notion of “porous passivity”, they think,

<sup>11</sup> In regard to complementing narratives about the resilience of police organisations during and post-crisis, see also the article by Kriegler et al. in the next chapter.



if a learning process for the organisation has been triggered, it could turn out to be a tacit one, hardly noticeable.

Beyond doubt, the imposition of measures to curb the spread of COVID-infections, like curfews, lockdowns or social distancing rules, has made for some none-too-pleasant lessons to be learnt by police organisations and police officers in unfamiliar encounters with members of the public. **Andreea Jantea** and **Mugurel Ghita** discuss by example of the Romanian case, how police authority was ignored, contested and challenged at incidents, when police officers were called out to enforce the adherence to pandemic restrictive rules. With reference to social conflict theory, they provide an analysis of what had happened and in what way management of policing could be improved in future. For sure, Romania is just one of several countries, where the policing of pandemic rules has led to confrontations on the streets with a, to date, unfamiliar composition of rabble-rousers<sup>12</sup>.

When, like in crisis situations, the police and other law enforcement agencies are tested to deliver against fluctuating public expectations, innovative tools and ways of thinking could come in handy for tackling what is too often called euphemistically “challenges”. This collection of conference papers has two articles highlighting innovative approaches for police management, emerging in context of the pandemic. **Carmen Castro**, **Joaquín Bresó**, **Patrick Kaleta** and others present technical and conceptual details of the H2020 STAMINA project, which aims at a “demonstration of intelligent decision support for pandemic crisis prediction and management” for the European domain. By means of combining several IT-tools, prediction of developments and optimal management of resources at the intersections of law enforcement and public health are meant to be optimised. **Sandra Walklate**, **Barry Godfrey** and **Jane C. Richardson** write about innovative practices in policing and handling cases of domestic abuse emerging during the pandemic in England and Wales. Their research highlights that, by agile and resilient thinking, police services for victims of domestic abuse had to be kept functional during the pandemic crisis (maximising protection of staff

while minimising loss of service quality) by figuring out new processes, which, in the author’s opinion, could be seen as “entrepreneurial policing”.

### Training and learning

As all organisations depend on a special set of skills and competences of their members, police and other law enforcement bodies have to take particular care for specific education and training endeavours. The disruption of normal training routines provoked by the direct effects and indirect consequences of the spread of the Coronavirus has had created a problem on its own to be solved by police managers and administrators. In that sense, adaption to the sudden circumstances for training and education can be seen as a subitem of the general task of riding a major crisis wave. However, CEPOL being a training institution, it is justified to group the five dedicated papers in this separate section as they describe problems and solutions found for teaching and learning alike.

The first scrutiny is reserved for a trip across the Atlantic to a city whose policing got notorious for its persistent policing problems: Baltimore<sup>13</sup>. **Gary Corder**, an internationally acclaimed police scholar and a previous Senior Advisor at the National Institute of Justice, together with Major **Martin Bartness**, a serving officer of Baltimore Police, let the reader into the story of the Corona-induced impediments they had to deal with, and how the academy of a large city police in the U.S. managed during the first period of the pandemic. It is worth to take note that, prior to the onset of the pandemic, two major shifts were already changing the training philosophy for police in Baltimore: On the hand moving away from a trainer-centred, lecture-laden teaching style towards a more learner-focused, interactive mode (almost eliminating “death by Powerpoint”) and, secondly that the design of police training has been made subject to external assessment and partly public comment. The list of observations and lessons the authors provide will probably ring a bell for many police educators from other countries and jurisdictions as well. A very similar account on the pressures of being Corona-forced to rearrange learning environments and methods under sudden circumstance, can be found in the paper by **Iwona Agnieszka Frankowska**, depicting the efforts to keep the basic training for the

<sup>12</sup> Typically, citizens who do not agree with the government-imposed restrictions of movement or behaviour, because they deny the existence of the SARS-COVID virus, do not buy in to the hazard of the infection for public health out of a believe that it is all a gigantic hoax of governments to suppress citizens’ freedom.

<sup>13</sup> „The Wire” is an American crime drama series aired originally in the period 2002-2008, telling stories about street crime and police work in Baltimore over 60 episodes. It received praise for its authentic depiction of life on Baltimore’s streets.

European Border and Coast Standing Corps under the auspices of Frontex on track. The specific difficulty here was to successfully convey the most important ethical values and the specific organisational culture in a learning environment, limited to online-tools only in the initial phase. By adapting and finetuning the available learning instruments to the given circumstances, the author believes, that achieving value-based learning outcomes is possible to a certain degree. In a similar optimistic and forward-looking spirit, **Mi-cha Fuchs** from the Department of Police Training and Further Education at the Police of Bavaria, highlights the actual chances the Corona-crisis had accidentally created for developing police training towards the needs of modern generations. His paper reflects the impact of COVID-19 pandemic against the backdrop of already socially effective mighty maelstroms and rapid undercurrents: demographic change, the mindset of “Generation Z” entering the ranks, overarching digitalisation, the subtle transformation of police work, and the need to pay attention to the public image and reputation of the police. While he describes the impediments and setbacks to training and education efforts as described in the previous papers, he advocates for preserving the courage for flexible and open-minded decision-making, the pandemic crisis has forced upon the police educational institutions.

The abrupt, accelerating innovation drive for training and education in the law enforcement domain is exemplified and illustrated in two further papers in this section. **Mara Mignone** and **Valentina Scioneri** introduce the reader to the H2020 ANITA project, a European consortium that tries to develop a technical cooperation platform for facilitating the policing of illegal online trafficking, guided by a strict “knowledge-based approach”. Besides informing about the aims of the ANITA project in general terms, the authors describe in detail how the pandemic forced them to restructure the co-operative development with the partner institutions and how they switch to remote training mode for being able to progress with the new tool. This papers, conclusion is that digitalised and remote training for law enforcement is feasible and innovative, and that such an approach needs to be framed by a similarly innovative didactic concept emphasizing the necessary equilibrium between exchanging, discussing and educating. Digitalising the formation of criminal law students in a multinational university environment has been the initial project objective of DIGICRIMJUS, presented by **Krisztina Karsai** and **Andras Lichtenstein**, from the

University of Szeged in Hungary. In their case, the disruption of the pre-pandemic teaching habits turned out to be the decisive catalyst for eventually implementing an idea, which had been breeding already for a while: students obviously like quizzes (who does not?). Hence, the concept of gamification has been put into practice by morphing a traditional classroom course on drafting legal documents in criminal law into an escape-room-style<sup>14</sup> online exercise.

What all five papers in this section about training and learning suggest is that it has been apparently a widely shared experience among law enforcement training facilities and institutions to be forced by the sudden introduction of measures for controlling the spread of the new COVID-disease to switch from traditional in-person and classroom formats of teaching and training to online and distance learning channels. The crisis, apparently, has spawned innovation and motivation to reconsider didactical tradition, while there seems to be as well a consensus that remote ways of training and education have been proven a potent and essential element, but not in themselves a sufficient condition for successful learning in the future – the joint full physical presence of trainers, educators on the one hand, students and learners on the other, seems to be an indispensable requirement for creating the sufficient magnitude of trust generating the level of “deep social learning” that drives good law enforcement.

### Pandemic effects: focus on analyses and critical perceptions of enforcement policies

The articles presented in the two previous chapters examined pandemic effects from a mainly managerial, intra-organisational perspective. The next line-up of contributions are written from an external, essentially scholarly point of view, trying to make sense of empirical observations and offering analytical insights as well as theoretical contextualisation.

The first article in this chapter takes the reader out of Europe, almost to the other side of the globe: **Anine Kriegler**, **Kelley Moul** and **Elrena van der Spuy** had conducted interviews with more than two dozen senior police leaders of the South African Police about how they perceived the management of the pandemic crisis by their organisation in regard to preparedness

<sup>14</sup> Wikipedia has this explanation of escape room: “(it) is a game in which a team of players discover clues, solve puzzles, and accomplish tasks in one or more rooms in order to accomplish a specific goal in a limited amount of time”.

and performance. By making illustrative use of quotations, they carve out two distinct narratives of their respondents, which are not unlikely to be identifiable in other geo-institutional settings as well: “the well-oiled police machine” vs. “the embattled machine”. The first narrative is typically about the police institution to be in control of the crisis – the Corona-pandemic being just another calamity, the police has to tackle by invoking routine operational practices under seasoned, capable leadership. This narrative simply affirms the expectations of governments and publics alike of the police being a reliable and efficient problem-handler in any civil crisis situation. The other narrative the researchers encountered is more telling about the situation on the organisational “backstage”: underprepared, hassled by changing and unclear regulations, constrained capacities and finally, yet importantly, – fear of infection-on-the-job. The stories the researchers heard in this regard were more about stress, strain and the struggle to cope with an unprecedented public health crisis – not exactly a “well-oiled machine”. The authors assert that, while the two narratives appear to be contradictory, they found them to be rather complementing each other in the institutional reality: “certainty coexists with ambiguity”; for sure, a noteworthy generalisable approach to comprehend police organisations and their actions in times of crisis.

With an added pinch of conceptual and theoretical ambition, Vienna-based researchers **Paul Herbinger** and **Roger von Laufenberg** aim to decode the effects the pandemic have had on police-public relations and consider what their findings might reveal about “... the structural relationship between policing and democracy in moments of crisis” by example of the Austrian case. Noting hurried implementation of countermeasures, based on laws and regulations lacking clarity – an observation shared by commentators for other countries – the authors diagnose resulting insecurity and confusion among the (Austrian) citizens. They introduce a three-spheres methodological framework in order to reconstruct the development of policing in pandemic times, including the dimensions *Governance, Law & Law-Making, and Policing in Practice*. In the authors’ view, an (arguable) externalisation of problem-solving from the sphere of governance to ground-level policing (and individual officers’ discretion) is, what had happened and has led to a strain of public-police relations – possibly not only in the Austrian case. Such a critical perspective is taken in similar fashion in the contribution by Dutch authors **Monica den Boer,**

**Eric Bervoets** and **Linda Hak**. They also recognise a deteriorating effect of pandemic countermeasures on police-community relations and social legitimacy of police actions, as those interventions have been subject to a process of “crisification” and “securisation”. By spelling out the variety of partially novel means of policing implemented and introduced during the COVID-pandemic, the authors stress that policing of the pandemic involves more controlling agents than the regular state police and they highlight, that the pandemic era has been “rife with protests”, fuelled most likely by latent social tensions now surfacing in the second year. Inadequate and (internationally) uncoordinated communication is taken as a major problem of management, together with an insufficient variation of policing-styles during the changing tides of the pandemic wave. The critical article finishes in with a constructive lists of lessons learnt, which could be useful for pandemic policing in the future.

In relation to policing in face of underlying social tensions and potential discrimination, two articles look at specific effects of policing in pandemic times on (ethnic) minorities or the „usual suspects“. Building on the research undergoing in the EU-funded COST grant on „Police Stops“, a network of scholars which aims to better understand the effects of proactive police controls in Europe, **Mike Rowe, Megan O’Neill, Sofie de Kimpe,** and **István Hoffman** examine if the onset of the pandemic has triggered a shift in police officers’ pattern of attention for stopping citizens while patrolling the streets. In the field, the researchers noticed „unfamiliar tasks“ for police officers on the beat, when they needed to check on activities and behaviour that, under normal, pre-pandemic circumstances, would not attract any attention. In their view, not much has changed, as “(...) policing continued to act as a disciplinary instrument in particularly problematic and unruly communities”. On the other hand, commentators had pointed out that the apart from individual suffering from the COVID-disease, the wider negative effects of the pandemic have not been socially evenly distributed, especially when it comes to socially or ethnically deprived populations. This point is raised and investigated in the paper by **Eszter Kovács Szitkay** and **Andras L. Pap,** which looks at the specific negative impacts of the pandemic on minorities and vulnerable social groups and subsequent potentially discriminatory policing practices. They identify specifically adverse scenarios that come down to biological, cultural, or social reasons or to over- or underperformance relat-



ed to actions of state. The point is illustrated in detail for the example of the Roma communities in various European countries and the authors state that a special vigilance and resilience against discriminatory populist tendencies is required from the police leadership.

*Communication* has been raised frequently as a central element of successful or failing management of the pandemic crisis. The two final contribution deal with this crucial category from two different, but equally critical perspectives. **Edina Kriskó**, insisting on established professional and scientific standards of modern international communication practice, takes issues with the manner the public has been informed and the role the police had taken in that during the pandemic crisis in Hungary. Analysing the format and framing of the official, government-led COVID-messaging, her contribution tries to emphasise the crucial importance of establishing the police as an independent, reliable and foremost credible source of information when it comes communication in critical situations. The final article in this Special Conference Edition by **José Pavia** and **Timothy Reno** is directing our attention to the sinister and disturbing side of communication in the pandemic times: the manufacturing of fake news and the spread of disinformation. The authors remind us that fake news and disinformation is with us since ancient times, but global social media networks have created immensely huge and effective distribution channels, making them attractive for those eager to grab power by manipulation. In the second year of Corona, there is plenty of evidence that intentionally spread false information has a fertile potential to create misunderstanding, mistrust, conflict, even open violence and riots. In that sense, this contribution links directly back to the first chapter on the criminogenic effect of the pandemic. At least, the author do inform us about policy-making in this regard on the European and Member States level – but they have opened another Pandora box to be looked at and prepared for by law enforcement institutions.

### ...a bottom line for law enforcement?

The articles in this conference issue of the European Law Enforcement Research Bulletin collate contributions from researchers, scientists and law enforcement professionals, who inform us about the knowledge gained about the impact of a global pandemic, a good year after it emerged and hit European countries as

well. In this regard, the conference and the resulting papers published here are part of an ongoing world-wide conversation among academics and professionals, who have no choice but to first understand and secondly smartly cope with the new reality of the crisis – the domain of law enforcement is no exception in this regard. Times of crisis leave little room for a “dialogue of the deaf”, but is calling for an interdisciplinary and interprofessional exchange of facts, figures and informed perspectives (see in detail Fyfe 2017).

The sorting order for this issue has been constructed along the topical clusters of “crime and deviance”, “managerial and institutional issues, and “analyses and critical perceptions of enforcement policies”. However, even a transient reading of the papers will reveal numerous empirical cross-links and mutual supplementation of research perspectives: additional insights might be on offer by pairing and comparing articles across sections<sup>15</sup>.

Already now, law enforcement communities across Europe and beyond can draw relevant lessons learned from this pandemic. The lessons might be different from one national service to the other. However, as learning organisations we should take best advantages from a cooperation between academics and practitioners to sharpen conclusions and to better position law enforcement services for the benefit of the societies. As some say: never miss the opportunities of a crisis.

But we are still not out of the pandemic. Let all place our hope on our next year that we can get to what we call our normal life. The development with the new variant by the end of 2021 put some scepticism into our hopes for 2022.

CEPOL is entirely committed to get back to a fully-fledged conference setup by 2022!

We are grateful for the commitment of our Lithuanian partners to try this joint venture out for the third time in second semester 2022. We do all sincerely hope that we can meet many of you in the next face-to-face edition of our conference in Vilnius.

<sup>15</sup> Just as examples: Neyroud/Maskály/Kutnjak Ivkovic vs. Krieglér/Moult/van der Spuy, Fuchs vs. Den Boer/Bervoets/Hak or Jantea/Ghita vs. Kovacs Szitkay/Pap.

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