

## Contributing to change—police education reforms in Serbia

### A Case Study for the OSCE50+

This report presents one of four case studies conducted as part of an OSCE Outcome Harvesting (OH) research initiative, led by the Office of Internal Oversight (OIO) to mark the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Funded through extrabudgetary support from Finland, this initiative engaged OSCE staff in a reflective analysis of the Organization's impact, identifying significant changes influenced by the OSCE's work across its region.

The research serves a dual purpose: to strengthen internal learning by fostering evaluative thinking among OSCE staff and to demonstrate the OSCE's impact to external stakeholders through concrete examples of change the Organization contributed to over the past 10–20 years.

In line with the Outcome Harvesting approach, this case study focuses on observable changes in the behaviours, practices and relationships of key actors—referred to here as 'changes' or 'outcomes'—to which the OSCE plausibly contributed.

Between September and December 2024, OIO gathered over 50 outcome stories from OSCE staff working in field operations, institutions and the Secretariat. This process went beyond documenting individual outcomes—OIO completed a structured analysis to identify patterns across the stories and produced a synthesis report to deepen understanding of how OSCE contributions have shaped developments in its region. From this broader body of work, four stories were selected for in-depth case studies, enabling a closer examination of changes, how they occurred and the OSCE's contributions. This case study explores one of these initiatives in detail—focusing on the observed changes, the actors involved and the interventions that influenced them.

## > Introduction

This case study examines OSCE-supported police education reforms in Serbia, focusing on the establishment of the Basic Police Training Centre (BPTC) in Sremska Kamenica. Over a decade-long reform process, the OSCE played a critical role in modernizing police education, strengthening professional standards and promoting human rights-based policing in Serbia. The OIO research aimed to substantiate observed changes and the OSCE's contribution, and to explore their significance for the broader professionalization and democratization of the Serbian police force.

This report is structured into five sections:

**Context:** The challenges that prompted OSCE engagement.

**Key outcomes and their significance:** The medium- and long-term changes observed.

**Contributions:** How the OSCE influenced these changes.

**Concluding observations:** Lessons to inform future OSCE efforts.

**Data collection summary:** An overview of OIO's research methods.

## > Acknowledgements

The assessment was conducted by Maria Delgado, an independent evaluation consultant, under the supervision of Leslie Thomas, Senior Evaluator at OIO. Nynke de Witte, Head of Evaluation/Deputy Director OIO, provided oversight and guidance throughout the research process.

The research followed a participatory approach, involving OSCE staff, government officials, BPTC trainers and graduates, and external experts. Their insights, combined with an extensive review of relevant materials, helped build a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the reform's impact.

The OIO research team would like to express sincere appreciation to all staff of the Ministry of Interior of Serbia, and the Basic Police Training Centre in Sremska Kamenica for their invaluable support during the data collection for this case study.

We are particularly grateful to the OSCE Mission to Serbia—especially the Head of Mission Ambassador Jan Braathu, Deputy Head of Mission Carolina Hidea, Head of Security Co-operation Department Umberto Severini and national officers Nataša Ristović, Radmila Todosijević, Luka Budinčević, Valdete Osmani and Branka Bakić—for their valuable insights, collaboration and assistance in providing critical data.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to associated partners who participated in the research and generously shared their perspectives.

## > Context: the challenges underpinning the OSCE's engagement

Following Serbia's democratic transition in 2000, reforming the police force emerged as one of the country's most pressing challenges. Successive democratic governments prioritized the transformation of the police into a depoliticized, decentralized, decriminalized and demilitarized<sup>1</sup> public service, accountable to citizens and aligned with democratic values.

In 2001, Serbia's police training system was widely viewed as fragmented, outdated and inefficient. Three separate institutions—the Police Secondary School, Police College and Police Academy—operated independently, without resource-sharing or strategic co-ordination. Their curricula, rooted in militaristic and theoretical approaches, relied on rigid, teacher-centred delivery methods with minimal focus on practical skills. This model was not only costly, but also misaligned with modern policing needs and international human rights standards.

“The police have become isolated from the community they serve. Their mode of policing is reactive and unresponsive, and they are mistrusted by the public at large.”

—Monk, *Study on policing in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, OSCE (2001)

The challenges extended beyond training. Police recruitment processes reflected deeper societal divides. National minorities remained largely underrepresented in the police force—reflecting unresolved post-conflict tensions—while women faced steep institutional barriers to entry and advancement. Perhaps most concerning was the recruitment of boys as young as 14 into police school, isolating them from broader society at a formative age.

Rather than cultivating a professional, community-oriented police service, this system reinforced a closed and insular police culture, disconnected from the public it was meant to serve. These structural weaknesses posed a significant obstacle to Serbia's broader democratic consolidation and underlined the need for comprehensive, systemic reform.

Recognizing the urgency of reform and the scope of the challenges, Serbia's Ministry of Interior (MoI) mobilized support and in December 2001, the OSCE Mission to Serbia was formally tasked with leading the co-ordination of police reform efforts. Over the next several years, leading up to the establishment of the Basic Police Training Centre in 2007, the OSCE played a pivotal role in shaping reforms critical to Serbia and Montenegro's<sup>2</sup> stabilization, including police education.

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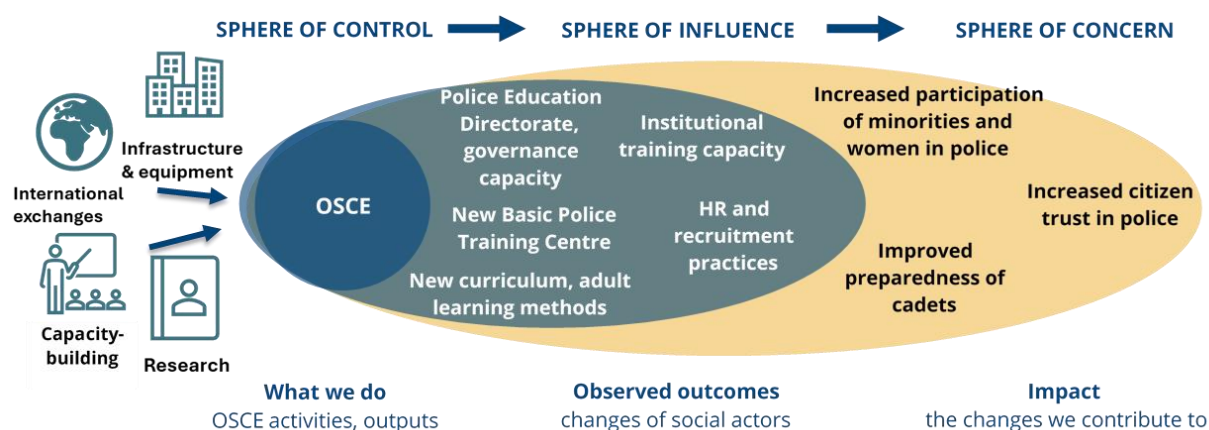
<sup>1</sup> The Vision Document, developed between 2001 and 2003 by the Ministry of Interior and others, officially introduced the four 'Ds' model to illustrate the key challenges of police reform.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of these reforms, Serbia was part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a federation that existed until 2003 when it was restructured into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This political union lasted until Montenegro's secession in June 2006, which marked the full independence of both states.

## > Key outcomes and their significance

The OSCE-supported police education reforms in Serbia brought substantial changes to the **institutional structures, technical capacities and training methods** used in police education, while also promoting **equal access and minority inclusion**. By modernizing officer training and recruitment, these reforms laid the foundation for a more **professional and democratic police service**, which in turn plausibly contributed to increased public trust and improved citizens' perceptions of law enforcement.

**Figure 1. Visual illustration of the sphere of influence of the OSCE's contributions to the reform<sup>3</sup>**



### Ministry of Interior established police education structures, governance capacity

Serbia's police reform took a crucial step forward in late 2004 with the establishment of the **Police Education Directorate**—the first structured system within the MoI for overseeing and co-ordinating police education. By 2005, the Directorate had facilitated the approval of the *Strategy for the Development of Police Training and Education*, setting a clear vision for modernizing police education.

"This was one of the major attempts to demilitarize and normalize the recruitment and socialization of police. The Basic Police Training Centre had this idea of bringing adults and not kids in, people who had experienced their first kiss, who had experiences with their peers, who can empathize and see what the needs of citizens are, in contrast to this military training of young boys in a high school. For me, that's the biggest revolution."

—An international security sector expert

The opening of the **BPTC** in 2007 marked another major milestone. The Centre replaced outdated, militarized training models with practical, skills-based curricula aligned with democratic policing principles. Unlike the previous system, which enrolled boys as young as 14 for four years of training, the BPTC admits only candidates—both men and women—over the age of 18.

Since 2007, 9,468 cadets have graduated from the BPTC, with 70 per cent completing training between 2019 and 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Inspired by Clark and Apgar (2019), *Unpacking the Impact of International Development*: Resource Guide 1.

## Police Education Directorate introduced competency-based curriculum, adult learning methods and institutionalized training capacity

Between 2003 and 2007, police training underwent a significant transformation, shifting from rigid, militarized methods to a modern, community-focused approach rooted in human rights and democratic values. Two main changes stood out:

“I believe BPTC students now receive more practical learning, whereas high-school students in the past built strong theoretical foundations but had to gain practical experience on the job.”

—A trainer at the BPTC

- A standardized, competency-based training curriculum was introduced, incorporating principles of human and minority rights, police ethics and community policing.
- BPTC staff were retrained in innovative educational methods grounded in adult learning principles.

Training staff and other key stakeholders consistently praised these changes, noting that the new training methodologies and curriculum provided a better balance between theory and practice and better prepared students for real-life work challenges.

Interviewees also noted the changes had a motivational impact on training staff who felt valued, “acknowledged and motivated”.

Originally designed as a one-year course with six months of field training, the programme has been shortened to eight months to increase the number of graduates and align with the Ministry’s evolving recruitment targets.

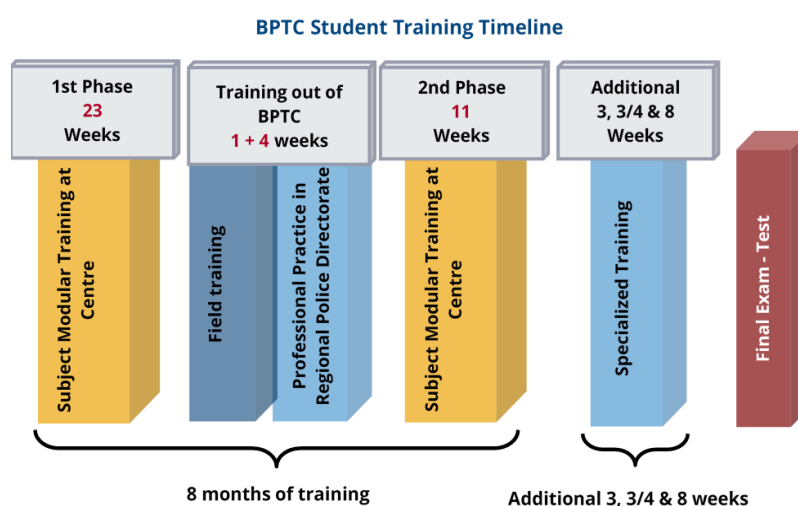


Figure 2. Source: BPTC website

## BPTC cadets demonstrate improved preparedness for policing roles

Testimonies gathered during the assessment consistently indicated that BPTC graduates were more mature and better prepared for contemporary policing. Stakeholders observed that these cadets significantly outperform those trained under the old high-school system.

Several government representatives referenced internal evaluations and research that corroborated these findings, reinforcing the view that the shift to a modern, comprehensive approach was both necessary and highly effective.



“In 2012, an evaluation of the training was done. Supervisors were happy with the skill of the students. Students were also happy. We noticed a difference as the training provided was more in line with the needs of the job. That was thanks to OSCE support.”

“This evaluation showed that the transformation of this high school into the basic centre was a good move. When comparing the former pupils or students at the high school with those who attended this basic course, those who attended this new basic course were considered more disciplined, better prepared and more efficient in their work.”

—Statements by Ministry of Interior representatives

### The longer-term outcomes of police education reforms

While immediate reforms focused on institutional structures and training practices, several longer-term effects are also observable—particularly in police culture, public trust, inclusion and internal management practices. Although harder to isolate, these downstream changes provide insight into the broader significance of the education reforms.

### Citizens reported increased trust in police and recognition of police as a public service

Security sector experts and existing literature suggest that a key assumption behind police education reforms was their potential to influence police culture over time.<sup>4</sup> Transforming the Police High School into the BPTC marked a significant milestone. It allowed young men and women to train together under a unified curriculum and introduced values and methods aligned with democratic policing.

One key milestone in the reform process has been the growing perception of the police as a trusted institution that serves and protects citizens—suggesting a possible cultural shift within law enforcement, even if direct measures of democratic performance remain limited. In this context, public trust serves as a valuable proxy for assessing the impact of these reforms.

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<sup>4</sup> Security sector experts have long emphasized the strategic importance of police and military education in shaping institutional culture. One analysis noted: “There are also areas that have received almost constant attention, such as both military and police education. Apart from being considered a ‘soft’ area, interest in this field is explained by the fact that education is crucial for future trends, attitudes and mindsets of security personnel.” Watkins, A. (2010). *Security Sector Reform and Donor Assistance in Serbia 2000-2010*, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), p. 25. Another assessment highlighted the cultural significance of transforming the Police High School: “Major progress was achieved by ceasing the enrolment of new students into the Police High School (SŠUP, Srednja škola unutrašnjih poslova) and providing support for its transformation into the Basic Police Training Centre (COPO, Centar za osnovnu policijsku obuku). This reform will enable change in the police culture by providing the opportunity for joint training of both men and women using same curricula, as well as the introduction of new values and methods into the standardised basic police training for all police branches.” Stojanović, S. (2008). *Halfway Through – Police Reform in Serbia 2000-2006*, in Hadžić, M. (Ed.), *Security Sector Reform in Serbia – Achievements and Prospects: Collection of Papers*, Centre for Civil-Military Relations, pp. 74–75.

OSCE-commissioned public perception surveys confirm a steady rise in trust in Serbia's police since 2008. In 2023, **44 per cent of citizens expressed confidence** in the police, up from just **28 per cent in 2008**, the year first BPTC cadets graduated.

Other surveys,<sup>5</sup> including those conducted by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy and the

European Social Survey (2018), support this trend. OSCE data also shows that in 2023, **47 per cent of citizens viewed the police as a public service**, compared to **39 per cent in 2022** and **only 29 per cent in 2008**.

Several interviewees stressed how the reforms helped shift the old policing model toward a more democratic and community-focused approach. Security sector experts and secondary literature<sup>6</sup> confirm that policing in Serbia has moved away from militarization toward more citizen-oriented practices. Today, routine interactions between police and civilians—including in schools—are increasingly common, something that would have been unthinkable in the 1990s.

The rise in public trust, as shown in OSCE-commissioned surveys, signals a meaningful shift in police culture and daily practices. While cultural change is difficult to measure, the alignment between expert insights and public perception data suggests a tangible shift has occurred. Given the central role of training in shaping police behaviour, it is reasonable to conclude that the education reforms introduced through the BPTC plausibly contributed to this transformation. However, many voices during this assessment warned of declining standards and levels of trust in the police, with the latest OSCE-commissioned survey indicating a drop to 41 per cent in 2024—possibly reflecting both the broader democratic backsliding in the region and recent changes to basic police training.

### Police recruitment practices increased representation of women and national minorities

While the primary focus of OSCE-supported reforms was on police training, security sector experts suggested that efforts to make recruitment to the BPTC more inclusive had important effects.

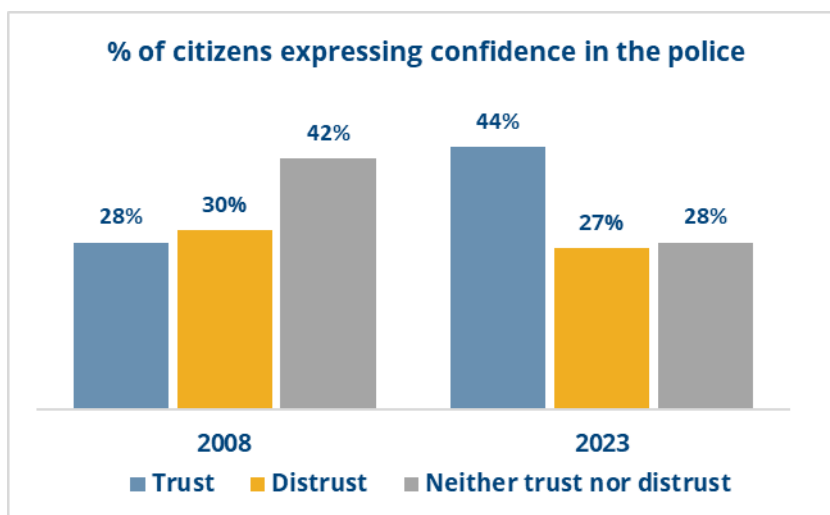


Figure 3. OSCE public perception survey results

<sup>5</sup> Public perception surveys on "trust in the police", including those conducted by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy and the European Social Survey (ESS), use different methodologies and cover different time periods, making direct comparisons difficult. According to the ESS, over 60 per cent of citizens reported some level of trust in the police (rating that trust between 5 and 10 on a 10-point scale).

<sup>6</sup> Stojanović, S. *Halfway Through – Police Reform in Serbia 2000-2006*, in *Security Sector Reform in Serbia*, p.76.

The opening of the BPTC in 2007 and the adoption of the new training model marked a turning point for women's access to police education. Previously excluded from police high schools, women began applying to the BPTC in significantly higher numbers. In 2008, women made up around 25 per cent of BPTC cadets.<sup>7</sup> According to a 2015 report by the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), there were almost four times the number of women applying to the BPTC in 2012 compared to 2010.<sup>8</sup> The OSCE Mission to Serbia further observed that this upward trend has continued, with female enrolment ranging from 26 per cent in 2019 to 32 per cent in 2023.

“One of the biggest police reform achievements is the fact that police service managed to become one of the most representative institutions in the public administration.”

—Yearbook of security sector reform in Serbia, Belgrade: Centre for Civil-Military Relations

The OSCE's efforts to make enrolment more accessible for members of national minorities were also praised. Community representatives noted that the OSCE played a key role in removing systemic barriers—such as limited Serbian-language proficiency among minority groups—that previously hindered access to basic police training. However, updated data on women and national minorities in the BPTC was not available,<sup>9</sup> making it difficult to assess long-term outcomes in this area.

### **Police education reforms catalysed changes in human resource management within the Ministry**

Some interviewees pointed out an unforeseen effect of police reforms: their influence on human resource management practices. The consultative process for defining police roles and competencies not only informed the new curriculum and training programme but also encouraged a more strategic approach to workforce development.

By aligning training with the practical demands of police work, the reforms helped shift the Ministry's focus beyond legal compliance and administrative tasks. Several stakeholders described this as a catalyst for the Ministry's first comprehensive human resources analysis—an essential step toward modernizing workforce planning and professional development within law enforcement.

Taken together, the outcomes of Serbia's police education reforms represent a significant step toward the professionalization, democratization and inclusiveness of the police service. The establishment of modern institutional structures, the shift to practical, rights-based training, and the increased representation of women and national minorities have all contributed to changing both public perceptions and internal police culture.

<sup>7</sup> Stojanović, S. (2009). *Police Reform*, in Hadžić, M., Milosavljević, B., Stojanović, S., and Ejodus, F. (Eds.), *Yearbook of security sector reform in Serbia*, Centre for Civil-Military Relations, Belgrade, pp. 165–210.

<sup>8</sup> *Women in Police Services in South East Europe*, SEESAC (2015).

<sup>9</sup> According to a 2022 official report submitted to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, from 2017 to 2022, national minorities constituted around 4.05 per cent of trainees completing basic police training at the Centre for Basic Police Training, <https://rm.coe.int/5th-sr-serbia-en/1680a87637>.



While multiple actors shaped this reform process, the next section examines the specific contributions made by the OSCE and how its sustained engagement influenced the outcomes described above.

## > How the OSCE contributed to the changes

### Established the Basic Police Training Centre in Sremska Kamenica

Across all sources consulted, the OSCE played a critical role in the police education reforms. It provided **technical assistance**, **supported curriculum development**, introduced **modern teaching methods** and strengthened **instructional capacity** within the MoI. The OSCE also championed **inclusive recruitment** practices and mobilized **donor support** to transform the outdated Police High School into a state-of-the-art training facility aligned with international standards. These efforts laid the foundation for a professional and rights-based police force.

OSCE Mission staff maintained a physical presence at Sremska Kamenica throughout the reform period and remained on-site until 2011 to support the BPTC. Their continuous engagement was cited as key to ensuring consistency and follow-through during a sensitive phase of institutional change.

### Produced foundational research

The OSCE, alongside Council of Europe (CoE) experts, helped shape the police reform agenda through two influential reports.<sup>10</sup> These studies assessed the state of policing, identified priority areas for reform and international support, and issued evidence-based recommendations.

The *Study on Policing in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (Monk, 2001), commissioned by the OSCE, was particularly impactful. It outlined priority areas—including police education and development—that were later incorporated into Serbia's official reform agenda. This research provided a strategic framework for modernizing the police force, realigning curricula and promoting a more representative service.

As previously mentioned, another key aspect of the OSCE's support was the research conducted to inform curriculum development and ensure a competency-based approach. This research not only shaped the training programme but indirectly influenced human resource management within the Ministry.



<sup>10</sup> Monk, Richard, *Study on policing in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, OSCE (2001); Slater, John, *Assessment of the Human Rights, Ethics and Policing Standards in the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro*, Council of Europe (2001)

## Co-ordinated donor support

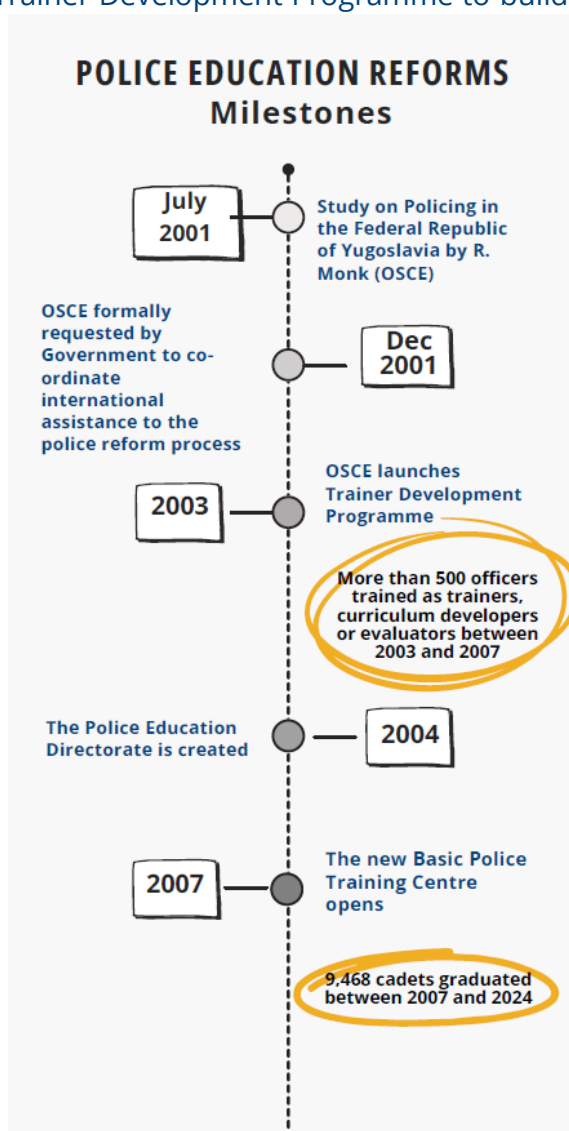
Since 2001, the OSCE has served as the lead co-ordinator of international support to the police education reform. It helped align assistance with government needs, avoid duplication and maximize the value of international contributions. The OSCE facilitated timely, prioritized and sustainable assistance that directly addressed the government's needs. This role involved maintaining regular bilateral contacts with key stakeholders—including embassies, development agencies, international organizations and international NGOs—and convening multilateral fundraising meetings.

Donor contributions significantly improved BPTC facilities and resources, adding new dormitories, classrooms and a situational training room. Other upgrades included an interactive information centre and library, a new website, and a video-shooting system, with some of these enhancements funded by the OSCE Mission.

## Built police training capacity

In 2003, the OSCE launched a comprehensive Trainer Development Programme to build the capacities of police teaching staff. The programme included four courses: a six-week trainer development course (training of trainers) and courses in curriculum development, training evaluation and advanced trainer development. Designed as a long-term initiative, the programme aimed to build internal capacity for designing and delivering modernized basic and specialized in-service training.

Between 2003 and 2007, the OSCE trained over 500 police officers as trainers, curriculum developers or training evaluators, equipping them with cutting-edge teaching methods, curriculum design skills and evaluation techniques aligned with international standards. By 2009, more than 1,000 officers from across the Ministry had completed the Trainer Development Programme, enabling the Ministry to scale up and sustain training nationwide. This OSCE-supported programme created a ripple effect, ensuring that new generations of officers would be trained by professionals well-versed in contemporary policing standards and training methods. With this expanded network of qualified trainers, the Ministry had the necessary infrastructure to institutionalize modernized training across Serbia.



In parallel, the OSCE Mission to Serbia supported the Mol with the development of a new curriculum that introduced the principles of human and minority rights, police ethics and community policing.

### **Promoted inclusive recruitment**

Since 2001, the OSCE has worked to integrate national minorities into police structures. It began by training the multi-ethnic police element in southern Serbia, which marked the first step toward a more systematic and inclusive approach to policing at the Mol level.

The Mission addressed barriers faced by national minority applicants by translating recruitment materials and entry tests into national minority languages, producing targeted outreach media, and organizing events to engage Roma, Sinti and other national minority group members. For example, following the opening of the BPTC, the OSCE Mission, Mol and the British Council held 11 roundtables with national minorities and socially vulnerable and marginalized groups.<sup>11</sup>

At the time of this assessment, the Mission to Serbia was supporting the translation and update of entry tests and advocating for a more flexible approach to language requirements, demonstrating its continued commitment to inclusive access.

### **Strengthened international exchanges and partnerships**

Through targeted initiatives, the Mission OSCE has facilitated international exchanges, institutional partnerships and capacity-building efforts to align police training practices with global standards and strengthen Serbia's police training capacity. Examples of this include:

#### **Study visits**

- In 2005, the Mission organized a study visit to the Dutch Police Academy in Apeldoorn for the representatives of the Mol's Police Education Directorate to learn about the training cycle organized around adult-learning principles and practical needs of the police service.
- In 2008, a study trip was organized to police training facilities in Slovenia and the Police Academy in Sarajevo, where participants gained insight into various training approaches and strengthened regional collaboration.
- In 2010, the Mission supported the development of Serbia's Police Field Training Officer (PFTO) programme by organizing a study trip to the Police University College in Norway, allowing PFTO co-ordinators to learn advanced training methodologies.
- In 2012, after inaugurating the interactive centre and library, the Mission enhanced library staff capacities through seminars and a study visit to the Swedish National Police Academy Library, fostering access to international resources and knowledge-sharing.

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<sup>11</sup> Final report on the first phase of the project *Police and Minorities and Socially Vulnerable Groups* (British Council and OSCE Mission to Serbia), as referenced in: Stojanović, S. (2009). *Police Reform*, in: Hadžić, M., Milosavljević, B., Stojanović, S. and Ejodus, F. (Eds.), *Yearbook of Security Sector Reform in Serbia*, Centre for Civil-Military Relations, Belgrade, pp. 165–210.

## Regional conferences and knowledge-sharing

The OSCE actively supported and organized events to foster knowledge exchange and regional co-operation in police training.

- In December 2004, a **two-day conference** co-organized by the OSCE, Serbia's Mol and the CoE brought together 150 domestic and international experts to assess the progress of police training reforms and discuss future plans, including the draft *Law on Police Education*. Key outcomes included the proposal to merge the Police College and Academy into a Police Faculty aligned with the Bologna Declaration and, for the first time, the introduction of the idea of replacing the secondary police school with a basic training centre for male and female recruits.
- In 2005, the first **Regional Conference on Police Training** co-organized by the OSCE and Serbia's Mol brought together over 50 experts from 13 South-Eastern European countries to evaluate police education and explore joint training programmes.
- In 2008, the **International Forum on Police Education** in Belgrade gathered 150 experts from 11 countries to discuss advancements in adult learning and their application in police training.
- In 2013, a regional conference organized with the BPTC focused on integrating minorities into police services, bringing together 22 representatives from police institutions across six countries to share best practices.

## Institutional collaboration

In 2009, the Mission facilitated co-operation between the BPTC and Hungary's Szeged Police School and the Budapest International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA). This collaboration led to a joint Serbian-Hungarian application for an EU IPA-funded *Cross-Border Co-operation Project* on e-learning about Schengen regulations. The OSCE also enabled ILEA trainers to deliver multiple cycles of tactical training at the BPTC's Tactical House, equipping Serbian police trainers with practical situational training skills.

## The OSCE's role in enabling transformative change

Across all sources consulted, the OSCE was widely recognized as a central actor in advancing police education reform in Serbia. Through sustained engagement, high-quality research and targeted technical assistance, the OSCE helped shape the institutional structures, training methods and professional standards that define Serbia's police education system today.

At the same time, the transformation of police education was a collective achievement, shaped by the contributions of several international partners. The Council of Europe played a central role in embedding human rights principles into training programmes, while such organizations as the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance provided critical support throughout the reform process. Donors, such as Norway, were instrumental in funding the establishment of the BPTC. Together, these efforts laid the foundation for a modern, professional and human rights-based police service in Serbia.

## > Concluding observations

### OSCE's vital role as long-term 'critical friend'

Secondary sources and testimonies gathered for this assessment point to one clear conclusion: the **OSCE played a critical and lasting role** in Serbia's police education reforms. By engaging with the government over the long term and delivering high-quality, evidence-based research and technical assistance, the OSCE

"This assessment, the expert's discussion, the study visits, the evaluation of the entire process supported by OSCE gave us confidence to push these reforms. We knew that we were working according to international standards for police education. The role of OSCE was very important."

—Former MoI representative

gained the trust of national counterparts and became a respected, strategic partner. Stakeholders unanimously recognized the OSCE's expertise and valued its respectful and supportive approach, which strengthened the reforms and ensured their relevance and sustainability.

This experience underscores the importance of building long-term, trust-based relationships with governments when supporting reform processes. By providing credible research and practical input, the OSCE positioned itself as a 'critical friend', offering honest feedback while maintaining a collaborative partnership. This trust and credibility enabled the reforms to take root, as stakeholders embraced recommendations from a reliable and respected ally.

Testimonies also highlighted the significant role of the international community—particularly the OSCE—in keeping crucial reform issues on the public and political agendas. By continuously advocating for these priorities, international actors helped ensure that reforms remained a focus for both the public and policymakers. National minority representatives, for instance, pointed to the OSCE's sustained emphasis on inclusive recruitment as a key driver of progress in this area. Stakeholders stressed that continued international engagement and attention remain essential—not only to advancing reforms but also to safeguarding its long-term impact.

### Political and contextual changes pose significant risks to the sustainability of reform elements

While the BPTC remains a cornerstone of professional police training in Serbia, its long-term impact depends on maintaining high training standards, institutionalizing gender and national minority inclusion, and ensuring continued alignment with democratic policing principles.

The OIO assessment found that the sustainability of Serbia's police reforms is fragile. Recent shifts in policy and institutional priorities risk undermining earlier progress. In response to perceived staffing shortages, the MoI recently reopened the police high school—now operating alongside the BPTC—and shortened the BPTC's training period. These decisions raised concerns among interviewees, who feared a decline in training standards and a shift to quantity-driven recruitment.



Most interviewees viewed these changes as a significant setback, noting a lack of clear rationale. Although the Ministry cited the need for more recruits, Eurostat data shows that Serbia already exceeds the EU average for police officers per capita. This suggests that the underlying challenge may lie in workforce planning and human resource management rather than actual shortages. Many interviewees argued that strengthening human resource policies could offer a more sustainable solution.

While modern training techniques introduced with OSCE support appear to have taken root, other critical elements—such as democratic policing principles, gender inclusion and human rights-based approaches—remain vulnerable to political and contextual pressures. Concerns over declining standards, weakened civil rights protections and police misconduct reinforce the perception that reforms remain fragile. Without sustained efforts to uphold core principles and invest in human resource systems, the long-term impact of Serbia’s police education reforms remains uncertain.

## > Data collection summary

