

Data, Policing and Equality: The Role of Local Law Enforcement in Preventing Discrimination

Introduction

Artificial intelligence and data-driven technologies are increasingly used to support decision-making in public institutions, including law enforcement. While these tools can improve efficiency and help detect patterns of criminal activity, they also raise important concerns regarding discrimination, bias, and the protection of fundamental rights.

For police forces, reliable and unbiased data are essential not only for operational purposes but also for ensuring that policing practices remain fair, transparent, and accountable. If the data used in decision-making reflect historical inequalities or incomplete information, the risk is that technology may unintentionally reinforce existing patterns of discrimination.

Studies at the European level have highlighted that algorithms trained on biased or incomplete datasets may reproduce or amplify existing inequalities if appropriate safeguards are not implemented (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022).

In this context, the European project DATA EQUALITY, co-funded by the European Union, aims to improve how data related to discrimination are collected, managed, and analyzed across Europe. The project brings together law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, and research institutions to develop a shared European methodology for identifying and addressing data-driven discrimination.

The Role of Local Police in Detecting Discrimination

Local police forces play a unique role in preventing discrimination because they are often the first point of contact between public institutions and citizens. Police officers interact daily with diverse communities and frequently respond to incidents that may involve discrimination, hate crimes, or social tensions.



For the Local Police of Murcia, ensuring equal treatment and protecting the rights of all citizens are key priorities. Effective policing requires not only responding to incidents but also understanding the social context in which they occur. Data can help identify patterns, detect emerging risks, and support preventive strategies.

However, collecting and interpreting such data is not always straightforward. Many incidents related to discrimination remain underreported, either because victims do not trust institutions, fear retaliation, or are unaware of the mechanisms available to report such situations. As a result, available data may not fully reflect the real scale of discrimination within society.

Challenges in Data Collection and Data Use

One of the main challenges faced by law enforcement agencies across Europe is the lack of consistent and comparable data on discrimination and hate-related incidents.

Different institutions often collect information using different methodologies, definitions, or reporting systems. This fragmentation makes it difficult to build a comprehensive picture of discrimination trends at the local, national, and European levels.

At the same time, the growing use of AI-based technologies in policing raises new questions about transparency, accountability, and potential bias. If the data used to train these systems reflect past inequalities, automated tools may unintentionally reproduce those patterns.

Research on algorithmic decision-making has shown that the quality and representativeness of datasets are crucial for preventing discriminatory outcomes (Zuiderveen Borgesius, 2020). Ensuring that data are collected responsibly and interpreted critically is therefore essential to avoid reinforcing existing social disparities.

Cooperation and Learning Through European Projects

Projects such as DATA EQUALITY provide an important platform for cooperation between law enforcement agencies, researchers, and civil society organizations.

Through this collaboration, partners can exchange experiences, identify challenges, and explore how new technologies—including artificial intelligence—can be used in a responsible and ethical way. The project also aims to improve how discrimination-related data are collected and analyzed, helping institutions detect patterns that might otherwise remain invisible.



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European policy initiatives increasingly emphasize the importance of transparency, accountability, and safeguards when using artificial intelligence in high-risk areas such as policing and public administration (European Parliament, 2025).

For the Murcia Local Police, participation in this initiative represents an opportunity to strengthen knowledge, share practical experience, and contribute to a broader European effort to promote equality and prevent discrimination.

Conclusion

Data play an increasingly important role in shaping public policies and policing strategies. When used responsibly, they can help institutions better understand social challenges, improve prevention strategies, and protect fundamental rights.

However, data alone are not enough. Ensuring fairness requires transparency, accountability, and continuous reflection on how information is collected and used.

Initiatives such as the DATA EQUALITY project highlight the importance of developing responsible approaches to data and artificial intelligence. By promoting cooperation and improving the way discrimination-related information is managed, such efforts contribute to building more inclusive and trustworthy public institutions.

References

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