



Organization for Security and  
Co-operation in Europe



# **MAKING LAW ENFORCEMENT FIT FOR THE FUTURE: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR POLICING IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FROM A SERIES OF OSCE EXPERT ROUND TABLES  
ON THE USE OF NEW AND EMERGING  
TECHNOLOGIES BY LAW ENFORCEMENT

**Disclaimer:** This paper synthesizes insights from four expert roundtable discussions held under the Chatham House Rule between October 2024 and October 2025. The views, opinions and conclusions presented herein reflect a synthesis of the roundtable discussions and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and/or its participating States. This document is intended to capture overarching themes and strategic opportunities without attribution to specific participants or their affiliations. Readers should consider this paper as a reflection of the diverse perspectives shared across the series rather than an authoritative statement on the topics discussed.

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# The context:

## Discussions that matter

The rapid evolution of new and emerging technologies — from artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to big data analytics, the Internet of Things, autonomous drones and virtual reality — is fundamentally reshaping modern law enforcement. These technologies present both opportunities to make policing more effective and efficient, and significant challenges that demand thoughtful governance, institutional adaptation and frameworks that ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

To explore these dynamics, the OSCE Secretariat's Transnational Threats Department/Strategic Police Matters Unit (TNTD/SPMU) organized a series of four expert roundtable discussions between October 2024 and October 2025. The events brought together law enforcement practitioners, policy-makers, academics, private sector representatives, civil society actors and international organization experts from across the OSCE area. Each roundtable focused on a distinct dimension of technology adoption in policing.

This synthesis paper distils the key findings, shared challenges and common opportunities identified across the four discussions, and outlines potential activities and initiatives through which the OSCE could support its participating States in this domain. It is intended to serve as a policy-oriented resource for decision-makers, practitioners and international partners seeking to advance the responsible adoption of new and emerging technologies in law enforcement.

- » **Harnessing new technologies to enhance crime analysis** (Vienna, Austria 22–23 October 2024): explored how AI and big data analytics can strengthen crime analysis while addressing challenges related to data quality, technical infrastructure, human rights implications and professional training. Summary report: [Harnessing New Technologies to Enhance Crime Analysis](#).
- » **The use of new and emerging technologies for crime investigations** (Farnborough, United Kingdom 11–12 March 2025): examined how digital technologies are transforming criminal investigations through expanded evidence sources, enhanced forensic methods and improved productivity, while highlighting the need to overcome institutional risk aversion and build adequate legal frameworks. Summary report: [The Use of New & Emerging Technologies for Crime Investigations](#).
- » **Engaging with communities through technology** (Vienna, Austria 18–19 June 2025): focused on how digital platforms can enhance public outreach, strengthen community policing in remote areas, support youth crime prevention and facilitate crisis communication and crime reporting. Summary report: [Leveraging new technologies to engage with communities](#).
- » **Streamlining organizational processes** (Vienna, Austria 8–9 October 2025): addressed the potential of digital tools to transform internal law enforcement functions, including human resource management, strategic planning, monitoring and reporting, and the cultural change necessary for sustainable technology adoption. Summary report: [Using new technologies to streamline organizational processes](#).

# The takeaways:

## Key findings and policy implications

Across the four round tables, several overarching findings emerged that carry significant policy implications for law enforcement authorities in the OSCE participating States and beyond:

- » digital transformation in policing is not a choice but a necessity — the criminal landscape is increasingly digital, and law enforcement must keep pace.
- » technology adoption must be strategy-driven and problem-oriented, guided by operational needs rather than technological novelty.
- » human oversight, accountability and transparency are non-negotiable — automation should enhance, not replace, professional judgment.
- » the pace and nature of transformation must be realistic, recognizing that different countries and agencies are at different stages of digital maturity and that lasting change comes through gradual evolution rather than one-step revolution.
- » co-operation — within organizations, between agencies, across borders and between sectors — is an indispensable foundation for the successful incorporation of new technologies.

### Technology can be a force multiplier across policing functions

It is clear that new and emerging technologies have transformative potential across a wide range of policing functions and services. In crime analysis, AI enables the processing of vast datasets to uncover patterns, trends and correlations that would be impossible to detect through manual methods alone. In criminal investigations, digital forensics, 3D crime scene reconstruction and AI-assisted processing of evidence are reshaping how cases are built and prosecuted. In community engagement, digital platforms extend the reach of law enforcement into online spaces where citizens increasingly interact. In organizational management, digital tools can optimize recruitment, training, resource planning and reporting. Technology, when adopted strategically, serves as a force multiplier that enhances effectiveness and efficiency while freeing up human capacity for tasks requiring professional judgment.

### Human oversight is a non-negotiable principle

**Human oversight must remain central to any deployment of new technologies in law enforcement.** While AI and automation can significantly enhance the speed, scale and consistency of some tasks and processes, they cannot replace the professional judgment, contextual understanding and ethical reasoning that are fundamental to policing. Critical decisions — whether in criminal investigations, personnel management or public communication — must remain subject to meaningful human control. The principle of the “human in the loop” is essential for maintaining accountability, legal compliance and public trust.

## Human rights don't stop at the digital door

The adoption of new technologies must be grounded in respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. When properly designed and governed, digitalized systems and processes can enhance human rights-compliant policing — by reducing bias, increasing transparency, enabling more proportionate interventions and strengthening accountability. However, without adequate safeguards, the same tools risk perpetuating discrimination, eroding privacy and undermining due process. **Human rights considerations must be embedded into every stage of technology development and deployment, from initial design to operational use and oversight.**

## Start with the problem, not the product

An approach that relies on problem identification and needs analysis prior to the adoption of technology is crucial. Organizations that invest in technologies and then seek applications for them risk wasting resources and generating institutional resistance. **Successful digital transformation begins with the clear identification of operational needs and gaps, followed by a deliberate assessment of which technologies can address them.** This principle applies equally to crime analysis, investigations, community engagement and internal processes. Strategic planning, rather than technological novelty, should guide investment and implementation decisions. Furthermore, not all problems are best addressed through advanced technical solutions, such as AI-driven applications — simple technologies may sometimes offer the most effective answers.

## No police force can do it alone

No law enforcement agency can navigate the digital transformation alone. **Effective adoption of new technologies requires multi-stakeholder co-operation involving law enforcement, government, academia, the private sector and civil society.** Public-private partnerships are particularly important: technology companies are key partners both as sources of innovation and as holders of data critical to investigations. International co-operation platforms play a vital role in sharing good practices, distributing the financial and human resource burden of technological innovation and ensuring that countries with fewer resources are not left behind in the adoption of new technologies. Cross-sectoral learning — for example, from healthcare, which faces comparable challenges around data sensitivity and AI governance — promises to be a valuable approach.

## Cross-functional and interdisciplinary collaboration are key

**Successful integration of new and emerging technologies in the work of law enforcement requires a cultural shift towards networked collaboration, where expertise is shared, cross-functional teams are encouraged and problem solving is approached collectively.** It calls for more integrated collaboration between operational units and technical specialists to identify solutions that can be scaled across different cases and contexts, and where human and technological capacities complement one another. Only by creating structures that support collaboration, investing in scalable processes and fostering a culture of openness and knowledge exchange can technological innovation in law enforcement be impactful and sustainable.

# The challenges:

## Barriers to tech adoption

Discussions across the four roundtables demonstrated that digital innovation in law enforcement is often an organizational rather than a technological challenge. In this context, a number of cross-cutting structural barriers emerge that affect the ability of law enforcement agencies across the OSCE area to harness new technologies effectively and responsibly.

### Garbage in, garbage out: the data problem

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge is the state of data within law enforcement. **Many agencies rely on outdated legacy systems with incomplete, inconsistent or poorly structured data dispersed across multiple disconnected platforms. This fragmentation undermines the potential of analytical tools based on machine learning and AI, which depend on reliable, good quality data to produce meaningful outputs.** Without significant investment in data cleaning, harmonization and management, the promise of data-driven policing will remain unrealized. This is further compounded by the lack of interoperability between different systems and databases at the national level, which often function independently of each other and without any common standards for data management. Interoperability between national and international systems represents an even more persistent challenge due to differing legal frameworks and concerns regarding data sovereignty.

### The human side of digital transformation

The profile of police officers is evolving: data scientists, analysts and IT specialists are becoming as essential as traditional operational roles. At the same time, all law enforcement personnel — from

frontline officers to senior management — require at least a basic understanding of the capabilities and limitations of digital technologies. Yet **many agencies face difficulties recruiting and retaining staff with advanced technical skills due to outdated hiring requirements, inflexible career growth pathways or unattractive remuneration packages compared to the private sector.** In addition, current training systems are often insufficiently adapted to the new reality, with digital skills training remaining sporadic rather than systematically embedded in professional development. With the continuous evolution of digital technologies, life-long learning and skills development in this area will become indispensable for all law enforcement practitioners. Ensuring a workforce fit for the future therefore requires a fundamental rethinking of how law enforcement personnel are recruited and the skills and competencies expected of them — a theme consistently emphasized across the series.

### Institutional culture and risk aversion

Law enforcement organizations are, by their nature, structured to minimize risk and ensure accountability, which shapes how they approach new tools and practices. This structure may become an obstacle to innovation when it manifests as resistance to unfamiliar tools, reluctance to experiment even within clearly delineated limits, and rigid adherence to established practices. Organizational silos — where units operate in isolation with limited cross-functional collaboration — further hinder the flow of information and the scaling of successful innovations. **Shifting institutional culture toward a growth mindset that values experimentation, tolerates controlled failure, incentivizes cross-functional and interdisciplinary collaboration, and rewards initiative was identified as one of the most difficult yet critical prerequisites for successful digital transformation.**

## Operating amid legal uncertainty

The legal and regulatory landscape governing the use of new technologies in law enforcement is evolving rapidly, yet in many jurisdictions it remains incomplete or unclear. Many participating States still apply analogue-era legal frameworks to electronic evidence, creating inconsistencies and legal vulnerabilities. The regulation of the use of digital technologies in the public sector — particularly in sensitive areas such as criminal investigations and personnel decisions — is at an early stage in most countries. **This regulatory uncertainty can both stifle innovation (when agencies are unsure what is permissible) and create risks (when technologies are deployed without adequate legal safeguards and oversight).** The need for clear, human rights-respecting legal frameworks that balance innovation with accountability is a clear requirement for the further adoption of more advanced digital technologies, in particular AI.

## A fractured landscape: uneven levels of digital maturity

A recurring observation was the significant disparity in digital maturity across the OSCE area. Some participating States have advanced digital innovation strategies, dedicated innovation units and mature digital infrastructure, while others are still working on basic digitalization of case management systems and criminal justice processes. **This digital divide means that policy recommendations and capacity-building support must be calibrated to the specific circumstances of each country and agency, and that organizations must be realistic about their own circumstances before digital solutions can add value.** For many, therefore, establishing foundational digitalization is an essential precondition for any meaningful future deployment of more advanced digital tools and technologies. Technology itself cannot fix fundamentally flawed workflows or compensate for poor, incomplete or irrelevant data.

## Faster is not always better

An issue that surfaced in multiple discussions is the **risk that automation, while increasing efficiency, may simultaneously reduce human attention and oversight.** Examples included managers approving reports electronically without reading them, reduced scrutiny of AI-generated outputs, and complacency in monitoring automated processes. The challenge is to design systems and workflows that preserve meaningful human involvement at critical decision points while still achieving the efficiency gains that technology offers.

# The opportunities: Putting progress within reach

Alongside the shared challenges, the roundtable series also identified a range of strategic opportunities that, if pursued, could enable the responsible adoption of new technologies that advance the ability of law enforcement to keep the communities they serve safe and secure.

## Digital technologies as enablers

There is consensus that **the most promising applications of new and emerging technologies in law enforcement are those that support rather than replace human decision-making.** For example, AI-based tools can serve as a “smart assistant” — processing large volumes of data, flagging patterns, drafting routine documents, transcribing recordings, suggesting follow-up questions and providing real-time access to relevant information through user-friendly interfaces. This can ultimately free up time and capacity for those tasks that require meaningful human involvement and interaction. This framing — positioning digital technologies, including AI, as tools that augment professional capacity rather than make decisions autonomously — was seen as both technically sound and strategically important for building trust within organizations and with the public.

## Building trust in the digital age

There is substantial untapped potential in the use of digital technologies for community engagement and trust-building. Innovative examples — such as police officers joining local Facebook groups, live-streaming gaming sessions with teenagers, or gamification of cybersecurity education for children — demonstrate that digital platforms can humanize law enforcement, extend its reach into communities that are difficult to access physi-

cally or which have low levels of trust in the police, and create new channels for prevention and co-operation with the public. Combining these digital approaches with traditional offline community engagement promises to be an effective strategy.

## Learning across borders, sectors and industries

The roundtable series demonstrated the value of structured, multi-stakeholder dialogue as a mechanism for advancing innovation. **Learning from peers facing similar challenges in different national contexts can advance meaningful innovation, as can engagement with sectors outside law enforcement that have developed approaches to management of sensitive data and AI governance under comparable constraints.** Expanding and systematizing such exchanges across the OSCE area represents a significant opportunity to accelerate learning, avoid duplication of effort, identify synergies and build shared understanding. Cross-sector and cross-border collaboration can also reduce barriers to innovation by spreading the burden among several actors.

## Developing shared standards and frameworks

There is a clear necessity to develop common standards, guidelines and frameworks — including human rights safeguards — for the use of new technologies by law enforcement at both national and international levels. This includes interoperability standards for data systems, legal frameworks for the deployment of digital technologies, standardized procedures for cross-border access to digital evidence, as well as shared training competency frameworks that define the digital skills required for different law enforcement roles, and common vocabularies for discussing AI and relat-

ed new technologies. Such harmonization efforts can reduce duplication, improve co-operation and ensure a more consistent level of protection for human rights across jurisdictions.

## **Pilot first, scale smart: innovation through structured experimentation**

The roundtables endorsed a model of **innovation based on structured and carefully managed experimentation: starting with clearly defined problems, developing and piloting proof-of-concept solutions on a small scale, evaluating results rigorously, and scaling successes gradually.** Approaches such as agile development teams embedded within operational units were highlighted as effective ways to ensure that innovation is driven by real operational needs rather than theoretical potential. This incremental, evidence-based approach to innovation was seen as particularly well suited to the risk-conscious culture of law enforcement.

# The way forward:

## Potential OSCE support to pS

The four expert roundtables organized by the Transnational Threats Department demonstrated the breadth and depth of the opportunities and challenges associated with the adoption of new and emerging technologies by law enforcement. From leveraging AI for crime analysis and criminal investigations to using digital platforms for community engagement and streamlining organizational processes, the potential for technology to strengthen policing is substantial. Yet **realizing this potential requires far more than the deployment of new tools. It requires strategic vision, institutional adaptation, sustained investment in people and skills, and robust governance frameworks that ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law.**

The OSCE, with its comprehensive security mandate, inclusive membership, network of field operations, established partnerships, and long-standing experience of supporting police development and reform is uniquely positioned to play a catalytic role in driving the effective and responsible use of new technologies by law enforcement across the OSCE area. The Organization can help by supporting — at pS' request and in co-operation with international partners — the development of policy guidance, delivering targeted capacity-building, facilitating knowledge exchange and promoting shared approaches that are grounded in respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

### Charting the road ahead

- » Facilitate dialogue on regulatory approaches to govern the use of digital technologies, including AI, in criminal investigations and proceedings, supporting the exchange of legislative experiences and the development of common principles and practices.
- » Produce a compendium of good practices on the use of new technologies in policing, showcasing concrete examples from OSCE participating States to inspire peer learning and provide practical implementation models.
- » Support the development of model frameworks for human rights impact assessments of AI-enabled tools in law enforcement, building on existing work by other international bodies.
- » Support the development of digital innovation strategies for law enforcement that are tailored to specific national contexts and needs.

### Building capability beyond awareness

- » Support the development of training competency frameworks that define digital skills requirements for different law enforcement roles, from frontline officers to digital first responders, specialized analysts and IT professionals.
- » Design and deliver tailored training programmes on the use of digital technologies in policing, covering topics such as crime analysis, crime investigations, digital community engagement, and organizational process optimization. These programmes should be calibrated to the different levels of digital maturity across participating States.

- » Develop e-learning modules for law enforcement on foundational topics such as AI literacy, digital evidence handling, human rights in the digital age, and digital communication strategies, leveraging the OSCE's existing training infrastructure.
- » Organize leadership seminars and command-level workshops to ensure that strategic decision-makers understand the key concepts, implications, opportunities, and governance and organizational requirements associated with digital transformation in law enforcement.

## Connecting the dots across the OSCE area

- » Create a recurring multi-stakeholder forum on new technologies and policing bringing together law enforcement, government, academia, the private sector, international organizations and civil society to share experiences, discuss emerging trends, build trust and develop joint approaches.
- » Establish thematic communities of practice linking law enforcement technology practitioners across the OSCE area, enabling continuous peer-to-peer exchange on specific topics such as AI governance, digital forensics, data management and analysis or digital communication.
- » Organize practical workshops, exercises or small-scale projects for law enforcement practitioners from different functional areas (operational, technical, administrative, managerial) to encourage and facilitate cross-functional and interdisciplinary collaboration, experimentation and learning.

## Bridging the digital divide

- » Provide targeted support to participating States at earlier stages of digital maturity, focusing on foundational digitalization of policing processes, data management systems and criminal justice workflows as a prerequisite for more advanced technology adoption.
- » Leverage the OSCE's field presence and institutional partnerships at the national, regional and international levels to ensure that capacity-building support reaches law enforcement authorities in all parts of the OSCE area, including those most in need of foundational digital support.
- » Build bridges between participating States at earlier stages of digital maturity and key actors driving digital innovation, including from the private sector and academia.

The insights generated through this roundtable series represent a foundation for the future. Translating them into concrete action requires sustained commitment from participating States, continued engagement with all relevant stakeholders, and a willingness to invest in both the technologies and the people who use them. The OSCE stands ready to put its comprehensive toolbox and practical experience at pS' disposal to support this journey.



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