



# COMMUNITY POLICING: AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH TO URBAN SAFETY

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*Report of the ICC Study visit, Fuenlabrada  
(Spain), 23-25 October 2018*

Report by  
Ivana d'Alessandro





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## REPORT

### Setting the scene

Community Policing is a policing strategy that develops an approach to surveillance and prevention based on ties, openness, interaction and mutual trust. It engages citizens in defining community-based and public space safety solutions. It is mainly founded on core principles of interculturalism and establishes a strong connection between safety and care.



The City of Fuenlabrada has mainstreamed intercultural community policing principles within the work of its local police for a decade now; it has created a specialised unit (Gesdipol or Team for the Police Management of Diversity), to serve its local diverse society, to encourage people of diverse origin to mix, and to engage them in making the city safer. Since the implementation of its diversity and inclusion management measures, Fuenlabrada has sensitively reduced the crime rate, and coexistence in general has improved, notwithstanding the overall social context which confronted the whole country (Spain) to a very hard economic crisis. The effectiveness of police management has been also increased with the implementation of a dedicated policy aimed at countering racial profiling. The latter has reduced the number of identifications by 50% while increasing the rate of

successful stops. Fuenlabrada policing model has also ensured greater equality of citizens in access to security, which is now understood by the residents as a public good.



Moreover, Fuenlabrada Police has developed specific competence on the rights of LGBTi people, migrants, and people belonging to religious groups. The City Council of Fuenlabrada launched its first programme on valuing cultural diversity back in 1999, when the forum for the social integration of migrants was also set-up. It did so from an equality perspective so to allow everyone equal access to public services, without discriminations linked to the cultural background and origin. Over the years,

the city further developed several subsequent action plans for coexistence and solidarity; the action plan against hate; the plan for the participation of youth; the permanent working group on coexistence; the intercultural competence training from a gender perspective; etc.

The visit showcased the overall intercultural strategy of the city under the policing focus, pointing out to the elements for its success including – when it comes to policing, an understanding of the local police as a service provider, and the full alignment of priorities between the municipality and the local police.

During the visit, participant police officers got training on Police management of Diversity, getting understanding of its missions, goals, and tools.

The training focussed on:

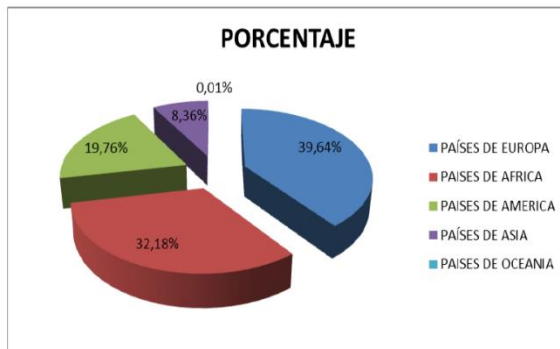
- Getting to know the territory and the people that live on it
- Understanding safety and security as a common mission to ensure peaceful coexistence in diverse societies, so that each citizen can fully enjoy his/her human rights
- Informing decision-making through citizens' participation
- Organizing policing as a service, in and outside police premises
- Addressing discrimination inside the police, including ethnic profiling
- Tools and techniques to prevent and prosecute discrimination, racism, hate speech and other forms of intolerance
- Providing permanent training opportunities for police officers, in and outside the police
- Establishing close cooperation with the citizens and the civil society.



# 1. THE CITY OF FUENLABRADA

The city is relatively young, it started developing around fifty years ago, transforming itself from an agricultural town of 2.908 inhabitants (in 1960) to a city of more than 200.000 inhabitants, mainly employed in the industrial and the service sectors. In 2016, the city declared itself a “Refugee welcoming city” and hosted more than 170 refugees<sup>1</sup>.

## EXTRANJEROS POR CONTINENTES en Fuenlabrada



Since the arrival of refugees – contrary to widespread prejudices - the crime rate didn’t raise. Actually it has to be noted that while Spain is one of the countries in Europe with the highest percentage of migrants, it’s also the 3rd in the ranking of countries with lowest criminality rate.

Nowadays, 13.7% of the residents of Fuenlabrada are migrants: 39% of the foreign-born are Europeans; 32.18 Africans; 19.76 Latin American; and

8.36 Asians. The average age of the population is young: 40 for Spanish citizens, 30 for the migrant population, and 25 for the refugees. Yet, inclusion of foreigners has not been as challenging as in other places. Due to the fast demographic change, the city never belonged to any group in particular: it has always been everyone’s city, and this is one of the key factors for the success of Fuenlabrada’s inclusion policies.

Other key factors of success are i) the long-term commitment of the municipal authorities and political leaders towards interculturalism; ii) a whole society approach; iii) the political stability of governing bodies at the local level which allowed for measures to be planned and sustained over time; iv) the interdepartmental and mainstreamed approach to public policies; v) the co-creation of policies with the citizens and civil society.



In the municipality, the Department in charge of inclusion policies has several services including:

- 1) An observatory for immigration, which carries out research, collects data, delivers training for technical staff, and facilitates round tables;
- 2) The welcoming and reception service, which deals with refugee policies, delivers training session for both the citizenry and the technical staff, provides legal advice, language classes (Spanish) and intercultural mediation;

<sup>1</sup> 70% of which comes from Latin America; 15% from Siria; 8% from Europe; and 7% from Africa



3) The Service on Participation and awareness, which hosts the permanent working group on cultural diversity, provides technical assistance to migrant associations, conducts awareness raising campaigns, and coordinates the implementation of the city's Anti-rumours strategy (implemented since 2013), mainstreaming it to all other city sectors, including the local police.

The Local Police is intended as an important service that the city provides to its citizens<sup>2</sup>. Its headquarters are located within the City Hall, so to show its openness and encourage all citizens to develop a serene relation with the Police Service.

Intercultural community policing has been adopted as a model for the local police of Fuenlabrada more than 10 years ago. It's based on the consideration that diversity is the huge complexity of being humans, and thus a Police wishing to provide a quality service to its citizens has to put people and their complexity at the core of its action. Interestingly enough, the motto of Fuenlabrada Local Police Service is "We want to be everyone's police", as it has been echoed by the Mayor during the Study visit, when he explained that the Police acts as an integral part of Fuenlabrada 's policy action and intercultural vision.

In fact, in Fuenlabrada the institutions are developed at the citizen level: built for them, and with them. In this context, the police and the city administration share with citizens a vision of safety and security as a common mission to ensure peaceful coexistence in diverse societies, so that each citizen can fully enjoy his/her human rights.



<sup>2</sup> It has to be noted that – very symbolically - the police changed its name from Local Police Corp to Local Police Service.

## 2. Police Management of Diversity: basic principles

Community policing involves the capacity of police to manage diversity as a strength. The background philosophy understands the police as a service provider that works to improve coexistence, grant citizens the full enjoyment of their fundamental rights, prevent and prosecute discrimination, and address conflicts in diverse societies.



To reach this goal, the police have to adapt and orient their services towards the social diversity that makes up the community. This means that the police must be fully aware of the composition of the community and of its social fabric in order to be able to provide quality services to all the neighbours in conditions of equality. Being visible in cities, the police also have a role to play in increasing the trust of a diverse population in the public services, and in helping the local citizens to consider the new citizens as neighbours. Besides, Intercultural community police have a key role for the peaceful inclusion of youth and must provide specific attention and assistance to the young people of migrant background that may find themselves in between two worlds: the family environment and the social environment. The police can play a crucial role in helping them

feel at home and overcome any possible identity conflicts.

In Fuenlabrada, a special unit for diversity management (GESDIPOL) has been set up within the police. The agents of the Unit receive special training on intercultural competence and dialogue, but also on human rights, LGBT rights, inter-religious dialogue and history of religions, mediation and attention to the victims, all matters for which they bear competence. Among their tasks, they carry out visits to neighbourhoods and associations during which they organise debates and meetings to discuss with the citizens their involvement and participation in security management. The main targets of these visits are diverse groups including not only minorities and religious groups, but also people with disabilities, and LGBTi groups.

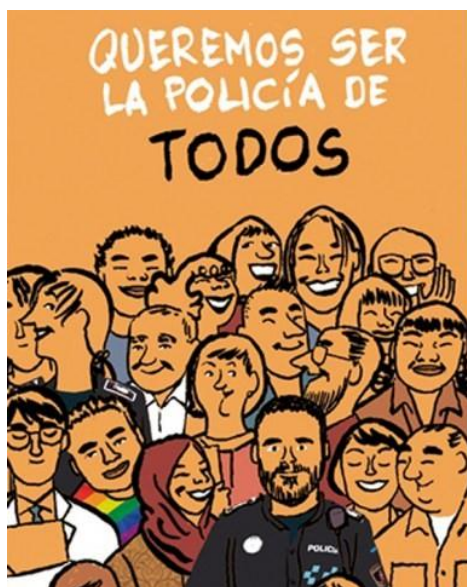
The experience of the model shows that increased mutual trust has facilitated prevention: building ties with the population enabled Fuenlabrada police to get better performance results in the detection of situations that might have generated conflicts or put people at risk.



This model involves an interdisciplinary approach to policing that has to be multicultural, multi-departmental, multi-identity, multi-sexual orientation, etc., as well as open to cooperation with the citizens and the civil society.

## 3. Main good practices

### 3.1 Anti-rumours Strategy



Fuenlabrada police is fully involved in the city anti-rumours strategy, acting as anti-rumours agent and helping to dismantle false perceptions that may undermine peaceful coexistence. This involvement includes contributing to analysing and collecting rumours or stereotypes, from the qualitative and quantitative point of view, so to be able to identify in details the false perceptions and stereotypes that have the greatest impact on the territory. This analysis, combined with police intelligence techniques, can help the police to combat the exclusionary discourse and hate speech, so to prevent conflicts and social tensions.

Fuenlabrada police also use social media to publish data and statistics that help countering the most widespread stereotypes and develop critical thinking among the citizens. The officers working in GESDIPOL (The Diversity management police unit) have been further trained to act as anti-rumours agents and partner with local associations of diverse groups (including migrants, people with disabilities, refugees, LGBTi, etc.) for organising awareness raising campaigns during which police make their support visible.

### 3.2 Hate incidents

Fuenlabrada has worked towards the preparation of an Action Plan Against Hate that assigns a crucial role also to police, beyond its traditional work. Notably, the police works at raising citizen's awareness on understanding, detecting and countering hate incidents, including by encouraging social resistance towards discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. Among its working tools, Fuenlabrada police provides training and briefings – alone or in cooperation with the civil society and human rights defenders - in schools, associations, and to other officers of concerned municipal services.



Besides, it has worked at building a protocol for the coordination of all municipal services so to be able to regularly meet and exchange information. When it comes to the civil society, the city has compiled a list of all entities and NGOs that work on diversity within the city so to promote networking and cooperation among all concerned actors. The partnership with the civil society reveals useful not only to increase the knowledge of police officers about the specificities of the different identities present on the territory, but also to strengthen mutual trust and gather useful information that allows preventing conflicts.



### 3.3 The “Delete Hate” programme



The Delete Hate programme has been put in place by the police to guarantee a quick elimination of graffiti that incites hatred or discrimination. The overall objective is to detect and erase any graffiti of hate or discrimination that appear in the city, within 24 hours from their detection.

As defined by the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers, hate speech covers all forms of expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance. It has a multiple impact: it undermines the dignity of the victims by degrading, harassing or intimidating them, but it also threatens the peaceful coexistence of the community by promoting prejudice, discrimination, and inciting violence individuals or social groups. At the local level, hate speech often manifests under the form of hate graffiti, which also cause damage to public or private properties, and contribute to increase the feeling of insecurity and the deterioration of the urban environment.

These are the main reasons why Fuenlabrada police felt that it was its duty to work towards combating the spreading of hate graffiti. It thus launched the “Delete Hate” programme that involves cooperation with the citizens and the municipal cleaning department through several steps:

- Detection of graffiti by the police or – alternatively – by the citizens that can then report to the competent authorities about the nature and location through social media and the #Borraelodio;
- Collection of evidence or verification of the complaint by the police. In both cases the police take pictures and GIS data for feeding a database that will help future investigations;
- Coordination with the city cleaning service for the deletion of the graffiti within the 24 hours;
- and investigative work for the identification and prosecution of the authors.

The implementation of the programme also involved prior preparation, including:

- 1) Training for local police to understand, differentiate and detect hate speech, hate crime, discriminatory behaviours and acts, stereotypes and rumours;
- 2) Design and implementation of internal procedures for effective investigation ;
- 3) Development of protocols for establishing the coordination with the city cleaning department;





4) Awareness raising to encourage citizen's participation in the programme.

In 2016, with a cost of 220 euros<sup>3</sup>, the police and the city managed to delete 144 hate graffiti. The number of hate graffiti has drastically dropped a year later, with less than 20<sup>4</sup>.

Fuenlabrada police commitment towards halting hate speech further translates into awareness actions. For instance, police vehicles display the motto "Fuenlabrada Stops Hate".

### 3.4 Eliminating ethnic profiling

When appointed, police officers commit to defend everyone human rights and, to do so, they must be able to act without prejudices.

Fuenlabrada police has accumulated over 10 years of experience in addressing and preventing discriminatory attitudes and behaviours also within the police. One of the main programmes carried out concerns the eradication of ethnic profiling practices and discriminatory *biais* in police identifications.

Ethnic profiling "occurs when police pay disproportionate attention to persons based on their real or perceived racial, ethnic, religious, or national origin—as opposed to objective and reasonable grounds for suspicion"<sup>5</sup>.

Apart the human rights concerns posed by ethnic profiling, Fuenlabrada police started its programme from the assumption that if police eliminates all useless ethnic profiling, it gains in efficiency. Fuenlabrada was thus one of the five police agencies in Spain that engaged in a thorough reform of its policing strategy through a capacity-building programme financed by the OSI between 2007-2008 and 2012-2013.



Their experience over the years shows that fairness is intimately linked to operational efficiency and effectiveness since it allows the police to make a selective use of controls and personal identifications, and concentrate on situations that pose an objective risk or raise a reasonable doubt. Fuenlabrada police has one of the highest success rates in the world regarding personal identification: since the police stopped ethnic profiling, 30% of the stops reveal administrative or penal infractions.

<sup>3</sup> Excluding the cost of police work, which has not been evaluated as fighting hate speech is part of their duties

<sup>4</sup> More info available in Spanish [here](#)

<sup>5</sup> See the [Technical Report on Fair and Effective Police Stops](#), OSI, 2006.

Besides a more efficient use of resources, reducing at minimum ethnic profiling has also reduced disproportionality rates, and increased citizen's trust in the police service.

After the end of OSI programme, Fuenlabrada has sustained (to date) the reform process and kept on collecting data that show the validity of its approach.

### 3.5 Attention to victims

The head of judicial police presented to participants Fuenlabrada approach to criminal issues, marked by a strong focus on protecting the victims. She explained that the concept of "victim" is very broad: it encompasses victims of crimes, potential victims/people at risk, and their families. The approach to the matter is holistic: at the police headquarters a special unit provides psychological<sup>6</sup> & legal support, advising the victim on the most appropriate steps to take to ensure conviction and reparation, helping them to find emotional balance, reducing future risks of victimisation, and ensuring the long-term follow up of all victims in terms of protection measures. Within the Service for Attention to the victims, special units deal with sexual harassment and violence, domestic violence, and child abuse, and school bullying, among others.



In terms of follow-up, it could be noted that the police is closely following 77 women that have been victims of domestic violence. For this comprehensive work, Fuenlabrada police has been awarded a national recognition.

### 3.6 Including people with disability



Within its "individualised approach", Fuenlabrada police provides special attention to people with disability. In 2017, it adopted a specific national protocol of action to improve the care for people with intellectual disability.

Another specific protocol, this time devised by Fuenlabrada police itself, concerns the services provided to deaf-mutes persons. The experience showed that the latter had not an easy access to information regarding the police and the services they provide. Besides, they had major difficulties in case of filing complaints or reporting to police. To address this problem, in cooperation and consultation with local NGOs, the police

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<sup>6</sup> Psychological support is provided by civilians, i.e. psychologists from the Municipal Service of Attention to the Victim who work in the police station without being police officers.

designed a web- application tailor made for deaf mutes. The application has video explanations in sign language. The videos were recorded by a policeman who knows sign language since his parents are deaf-mutes.

### 3.7 Interreligious coexistence



Already back in 2009 Fuenlabrada police promoted the creation of an Intercultural Commission of Citizens security, to set-up a permanent dialogue between the police services and their diverse community and allow the latter to fully participate in the city security management. The Commission includes all 33 registered religions/confessions present in the city. The baseline for addressing the specific needs of diverse groups is the consideration that these have greater chances to become victims of hate

crimes because of their diversity, and at the same time their own realities (language barrier, socio-economic vulnerability in some cases, family context, etc.) may make it more difficult for them to fully enjoy their rights.

The creation of the Commission has ensured that on the one hand the police is fully acquainted with the specific cultural norms of diverse groups (for instance, GESDIPOL has in its agenda all festivities and celebrations foreseen in the calendars of the religious groups present in the city, which allows police to be prepared to ensure that public events related to religious festivities are carried out with all the necessary safety conditions); on the other hand, that diverse communities get full understanding of Spanish standards, laws, and procedures, so to comply with them.

Participants in the study visit visited Fuenlabrada Islamic cultural centre, which is also part of the Intercultural Commission. The Centre was set-up in 2002 and has a strong focus on enhancing Muslim women participation in social life; training educational leaders; and youth empowerment so that young people can fully act as citizens. The governing body of the centre has equal percentage of women and men: "We build community and active citizens within the whole community" said Mimoun Amrioui, President of the Islamic Community of Fuenlabrada. The Centre participants in several international projects funded by the EU; the more recent one aims at integrating young people into the labour market. Through the Intercultural Commission, the Islamic community fully participated in Fuenlabrada Police programme to stop ethnic profiling.





According to Mr Amrioui, the key for a smooth and serene relation of his community with the local police is the trust that GESDIPOL has managed to build. Two other factors were again identified: the political will to consider the city as irreversibly intercultural; the readiness of all citizens to participate into building a society for all. He stressed that contacts with the local police occur on a regular basis, and are not determined by security concerns. Actually Mr Amrioui stressed that for trust to exist, it's necessary to establish a relation with the police which is not only linked to addressing incidents. For instance, the Centre often hosts debates between the police and the Islamic community.



### 3.8 Preventing school bullying

Another important aspect to take into account for community cohesion is raising awareness about school bullying, a practice which is intimately linked to hate crimes and that affect children's identity building process, sometimes since a very young age.

Fuenlabrada police has devised – already in the year 2000 - probably one of the most ambitious programmes of actions in all Spain in this field, the School Safety Plan. Each school – so as the Parents' associations in the city - have direct and monthly contacts with one of the police specialised teams. The Police – together with a partner psychologist, regularly gives talks in primary and secondary school to explain the consequences of school harassment on both the victims and the authors, with a view to educate kids on how to prevent negative behaviours, how to distinguish conflict from harassment, and how to spot and denounce hate. Sometimes these talks are also occasions to detect problems that have not yet surfaced.



## 4. Conclusions of the study visit

During the two-day study visit in Fuenlabrada participants had the chance to also meet the representatives of migrant and of Roma communities. The exchange with them confirmed that intercultural policing is a successful mean to build solid relations of trust between the citizens and public security institutions, and to achieve a greater feeling of safety and cohesion.

The migrant and Roma communities conveyed us an extremely positive vision of the local police, to which they look at as partners and – to some extent – as role models. They particularly praised the time spent with GESDIPOL officers, be this during public talks organised in migrant associations' premises, at the intercultural breakfasts, at social events, or on the occasion of religious public celebrations.

Besides, migrant communities appreciated the pedagogical efforts done by local police to raise awareness about citizens' rights and duties, which helped them better understanding the local environment. The general opinion was that Fuenlabrada is very resilient to racism and populism thanks to the fact that public authorities have sustained intercultural policies on the long-term. These include tools to ensure citizens' participation (among which the table for coexistence), anti-racism and anti-rumours campaigns, conflict mediation, and an unprecedented effort to give visibility to all communities in the city, while understanding culture and cultures as a common heritage to cherish and protect.

In the words of the City Councillor for Equality and security: "Cultural diversity gives depth to our city. That is why we are deeply committed with the eradication of distrust, discrimination and hate". And this approach definitely pays off.

