

# Chapter 8

## ICTs and Community Policing: An Ethical Framework



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Measuring the impact of innovation in CP is a necessary action that ensures the achievement of beneficial outcomes, nourishing positive community-police relationships while minimizing negative externalities such as bias, discrimination or a negative impact on social cohesion. The present work aims at filling this gap through the construction of an ethical framework in this field based on both the results of desk research activities and empirical fieldwork. The first provide an ethical framework for technology-mediated community policing by identifying, compiling and analysing preceding cases, successes and failures, and key factors to be considered. The second sheds light on specific ethical considerations and socio-cultural settings.

### Impacts of Innovation in Community Policing

This section explores both the positive and the negative aspects of technology-mediated community policing by evaluating societal and ethical aspects. Paying attention to societal and ethical issues helps to prevent negative or unintended consequences that could worsen police-community relationships, further communities' distrust towards the police, create information overflow or too much responsibility for individual officers, and lead to calumny and defamation of innocents.

Through information technology, people can make their voices heard and communicate their concerns to the police effectively; at the same time, the police can use these media to identify the specific demands of any given community and the causes of their feelings of insecurity. Further, they can also employ crowdsourcing

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techniques to gather information about crimes, crime patterns and other hazards, and effectively respond to those. Additionally, social media channels can help the police to inform the public and make its work more transparent and relatable. In turn, ICTs can help establish better police accountability as the public can employ media channels for ‘policing the police’ and communicating cases of police abuse.

However, the use of ICTs can also be source of negative and undesirable effects. First of all, the extensive use of modern technology can lead to policing strategies that benefit certain groups and disadvantage others, as digital literacy and access to technology is not equally distributed within a society and varies according to age, wealth, social class and other factors. Moreover, crowdsourcing information from the public can lead to the spread of false rumours and accusations, and civil initiatives can even lead to cases of unlawful lynch mob justice. When employing statistical data and data correlations and extensive means of surveillance, technology-mediated community policing can potentially foster racial profiling and discrimination against minorities and reinforce stereotypes. Further, if data and statistics are employed for predictive policing, and if police action is fostered by assumptions based on past correlations, this can transgress the presumption of innocence to which democratically justified policing is bound. Therefore, it is important to keep fundamental rights and their protection in mind, such as the right to privacy, the right to informative self-determination, the right to physical and mental integrity, freedom of expression and presumption of innocence.

## *ICTs and Policing*

In policing contexts, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have many different applications and uses. In many cases, police may utilize the standard privately-owned social media platforms and their services, such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *WhatsApp* and *YouTube*. These can be employed to foster a good relationship between the community and the police but also to make police work more relatable and transparent by communicating about everyday activities. For instance, the American Civil Liberties Union has released the freeware app *Police Tape*, which allows civilians to record law enforcement encounters.

Many of the ‘standard’ social platforms and their functionalities are often employed not only in emergencies and daily police work, but also by (para)policing initiatives that originate from civil society itself. Examples of such initiatives are so-called *neighbourhood watch (NW)* initiatives, which may have different degrees of authorization and official recognition, varying from country to country. They describe civil initiatives in which citizens organize and take action to help each other and foster community relations, but also to prevent crime and increase safety in their neighbourhoods. In the US, Los Angeles’ so-called *Large Emergency Event Digital Information Repository*, or short LEEDIR,<sup>1</sup> is an “eyewitness platform”,

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<sup>1</sup>LEEDIR website: <http://www.leedir.com>

where citizens upload files or broadcast their webcams to share photos and videos of crime scenes, incidents, or other material they find important to share with the police during large scale events, attacks, disasters and so forth. They can also integrate external content from services like *Facebook*, *Google*, *Instagram* and *YouTube* for this purpose.

*TapShield* is another app related to ‘crowd-sourced’ policing. TapShield’s aim is to empower citizens to feel safer, especially when walking the streets at night, by being directly and continuously connected to the police or others via their phone, and by using community-based security through crowd-sourced information about incidents. It makes extensive use of GPS tracking and includes functions like a silent alarm that can be used to inform the police of an emergency or attack discreetly and without the knowledge of the perpetrators; alerts about crime incidents around its user’s location; a one-key function for phoning the police; an alarm which can be sent when headphones are removed; and a way for pedestrians to share their route and estimated time of arrival with their family or friends.<sup>2</sup> This app also uses crowdsourcing techniques to match up reported incidents with maps and the GPS coordinates of users. Matching up of crime data with geolocation data is a widely employed way to use ICTs for policing purposes; the resulting maps are called *crime maps*.

### ***Community Policing Failures***

If the societal and ethical implications of technology-mediated policing practices are not given enough consideration in advance, undesired consequences may occur.

In 2014, the New York Police Department (NYPD) launched the #myNYPD Twitter campaign<sup>3</sup> and asked people to tweet photos with members of the department under that hashtag. The social media campaign was meant to shed a positive light on the work of the department and its officers in the city. However, contrary to NYPD’s expectations, people started using the promoted hashtag to tweet and share pictures of police brutality and abuse in the city, mocking NYPD’s social media effort (Tran 2014). The department could have anticipated that people would use the platform and take up the hashtag to make their frustration heard. Such sharing systems are good for enabling people to perform ‘sousveillance’ on their authorities and hence increase police accountability, but at the same time they may foster a negative image of them.

Other unexpected and undesirable effects were also observable during the Boston Marathon Bombing. When the police started to crowd-source information, this apparently also invited civil ‘internet detectives’ to start a downright manhunt by making speculative claims on the basis of their personal analyses of pictures on the web. These claims consequently led to a number of false accusations that had severe

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<sup>2</sup>TAPSHIELD website: <http://TapShield.com/works>

<sup>3</sup>Twitter (#mynypd): <https://twitter.com/hashtag/mynypd>

repercussions for their victims, who received threats and insults. Such developments emphasize the need to always weigh potential gains from crowdsourcing police work against the potential harm this can cause. Police forces have to develop reliable mechanisms to ensure that information is communicated as accurately and comprehensively as possible, and that inaccurate accusations or rumours are dismantled in real time.

When it comes to societal and ethical aspects of community policing, issues of social justice such as racial profiling, the perpetuation of prejudices and discrimination against minorities present a major factor. The introduction of ICTs does not ensure that bad practices will be avoided. On the contrary, technologies themselves may incorporate and remark biases. The iPhone app *SketchFactor* for example has been criticized from a social justice perspective. It was designed to let people crowdsource and share information about the “sketchiness” of neighbourhoods and report on people they deem suspicious or dangerous. This app has been criticized for perpetuating racism and discrimination, as it appears to facilitate the spread of stereotypes and labelling neighbourhoods based on subjective impressions and opinions (Biddle 2014). Since the app’s crime maps are based on opinion more than on evidence, its data is inaccurate and its crime reports do not match up with the police’s official crime maps. *SketchFactor* reports are not reviewed before they become visible to everyone, and they can be quite biased or vague in tone. For the same reasons, Microsoft’s *Pedestrian Route Production* app, which offers similar functions, has been viewed critically and consequently been dubbed the “Avoid Ghetto” app (King 2012).

### ***Risks and Societal Impact of ICTs***

There is a set of aspects related to policing activity where the ICTs may have both a potential positive and negative impact. Among them: the performance of the interventions; the crime prevention plans; the effectiveness of communication; the social engagement and social cohesion; the trust towards authorities and within communities, and the public image of police forces.

The prevention and mitigation of potential risks that may appear during the implementation of ICT-based CP projects must consider a wide range of factors. All the stakeholders, including officers, victims, suspects, witnesses, etc., must play a role in the design and assessment phases. Personal safety during crowd-sourced actions is also a key question to be included in the planning: involved citizens must not be put at risk and their contribution must be limited to safe activities (e.g. information). The conjunction of ICTs and security also raises obvious concerns on risks regarding increased surveillance threatened privacy guarantees. Management of information is another crucial aspect to be considered during the risk assessment: misinformation, rumours, false accusations and uncontrolled data are potential consequences that would affect the desirability of a system. Usability problems are also to be controlled, including digital divide and unequal access to the developed

technologies, which may question the actual contribution and shared benefits of the project. Lastly, risks include unlawful practices and biased interventions based on profiling and discrimination.

## **Measuring the Impact: Analysis and Assessment**

In order to avoid such negative effects, the employment of ICTs in community policing requires a thorough analysis of its ethical and societal implications, which should build the basis for the establishment of solid guidelines and policies to follow. Further, such an analysis can inform the value-sensitive design of technologies for policing purposes. If information technologies are employed, data management strategies need to be created in order to mitigate potential risks. A multi-step approach, that intervenes before, during and after the implementation of the innovations improves the chances for a successful and effective assessment. The prior evaluation should take place during the design of the tool or service and must take into account the legal framework, the State of the art, the specific context and potential existing incompatibilities. The assessment of the work in progress must consider the potential effects of the chosen elements and functionalities, the evaluation of the demonstrations/tests and suggest the necessary corrections. The **final evaluation and oversight** entails the evaluation of the final product and a periodic replicable assessment (e.g. a checklist), measuring the effects on the long term, detecting needs for updates and predicting the chances for sustainability.

## ***Contextual, Human and Technological Factors in Community Policing***

Any general discussion of societal and ethical aspects can only function as a guideline for thinking through potential risks and applications, but the concrete framework will have to be adjusted case by case – there is no single model that suits all ICT-mediated CP initiatives. Community policing always deals with and responds to contextually unique situations. The following section provides an overview of different contextual factors, such as issues of prejudice, discrimination and social justice, police integrity and accountability, digital divides and data handling. The specific socio-cultural setting in which a practice is implemented, the community's particular social structure, the neighbourhood's history and its existing community-police relations all shape the way community policing is carried out, its societal effects and its overall success. The success and desirability of CP practices varies from country to country. However, we can suspect differences in attitudes toward community policing and neighbourhood watch initiatives between different groups of a country's inhomogeneous population.

For CP initiatives it can be important to employ officers who are thoroughly familiar with the community, its people and culture, due to their knowledge and understanding of the community, which is needed to make the right contextual decisions. However, employing local officers is not necessarily a guarantee for desired outcomes like good community-police relations (Ziembo-Vogl and Meško 2000). In the case of the “dirty 30”, a group of local CP officers in the NYPD had used their position and their good connections within the community to participate in and eventually profit from major drug deals in the community for 3 years. The distributed character of community policing and its flat hierarchies can sometimes complicate oversight of police activities. CP officers carry higher responsibility as they have to make decisions more autonomously, but this also diminishes accountability and oversight. An app like *CrimePad*, which makes it possible for police on the beat to document incidents, share information and get advice from other officers in real time, can hence offer support and help establish better oversight (Byrne 2014).

The efficacy of social media campaigns will also depend on the profile of its target audience, which could imply that different strategies would be required. The digital divide, which describes inequalities in the use and access to modern ICTs could play a key role (Van Dijk 2006). Due to this factor, the use of ICTs in policing might create a social bias or discriminate against certain people (elderly, low-income, disabled, etc.), implying different chances to benefit from public security innovations. Therefore, different degrees of technological literacy have to be taken into account: for instance, the *SketchFactor* app, has been criticized for being available only for iPhones and not for cheaper devices (Cueto 2014).

The reliability of crowd-sourced information is another great challenge. A reliable system has to be based on data that surpassed the problem of information quality, which means that it complies with certain requisites in terms of relevance, quantity, accuracy, timeliness, completeness, format and availability (Bharosa et al. 2009). There have been numerous cases where people have sabotaged initiatives, uploaded fake or manipulated images, or consciously spread false information. For this reason, some projects have worked on creating technologies that allow the verification of the origin and date of a picture, or other image-related data.<sup>4</sup> In addition to ensuring data reliability, it is important to secure the stored records properly, so vulnerable information is protected from being hacked and manipulated.

Community Policing is linked to the problem-oriented policing approach, which focuses on the systematic causes for certain crime patterns; this approach defends that it is better to tackle the root of the problem and prevent crimes *before* they happen. Predictive policing is based on this premise, and uses surveillance and data collection to statistically analyse crime patterns and to introduce measures aimed at reducing those factors leading to criminal activity. Nevertheless, this approach may foster conflicts with the right to presumption of innocence. Predictions always depend on likelihood and can never be 100% certain; additionally they are often biased by prejudices or can perpetuate negative stereotypes. Hence, it can be ques-

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<sup>4</sup> [Stopfake.org: 13 online tools that help to verify the authenticity of a photo.](http://www.stopfake.org/en/13-online-tools-that-help-to-verify-the-authenticity-of-a-photo/) <http://www.stopfake.org/en/13-online-tools-that-help-to-verify-the-authenticity-of-a-photo/>

tionable to employ data for ‘precrime’ efforts, both with regard to our obligation to presume innocence and because relying on statistics can stigmatize innocent people and law-abiding citizens just because they belong to a certain group, such as immigrants or minorities.

### Ethical Framework for ICT-Mediated Community Policing

In order to appraise the societal aspects of technology-mediated community policing it is important to focus on their broad scope of applications, whereas the societal impact of technological developments can be explored according to four sub-dimensions (Fig. 8.1): desirability (the actual need of a certain technology), acceptability (the extent to which a technological innovation will be welcomed by a community), ethics (the shared values and moral standards embedded in a society) and data management (the consequences a system may have regarding privacy and data protection).

The present results are based on a research that took place in the context of the INSPEC<sup>2</sup>T project (Inspiring CitizeNS Participation for Enhanced Community PoliCing AcTions). This initiative, funded by the European Commission under the

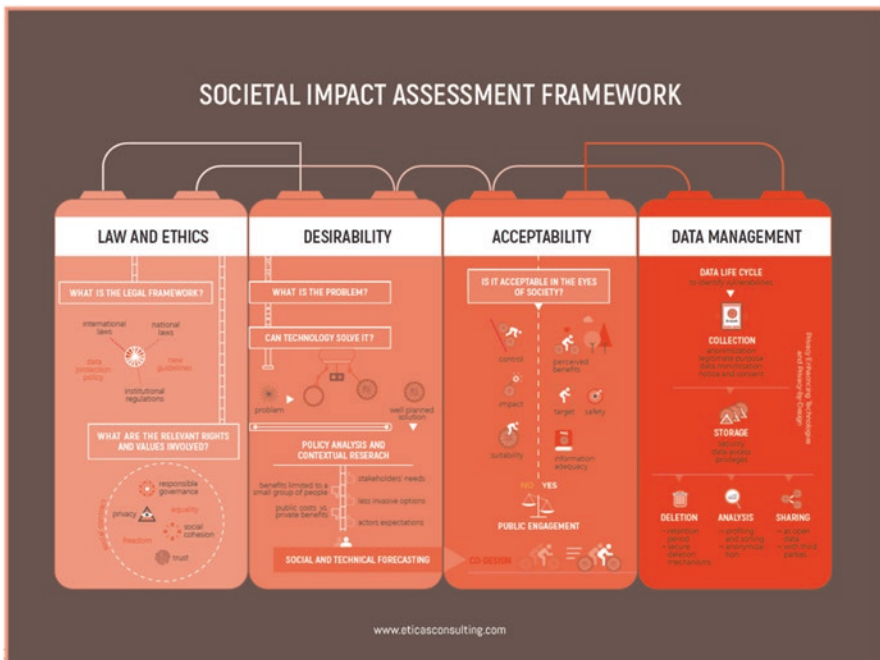


Fig. 8.1 Four-tier societal impact assessment framework



H2020-FCT-2014 call, aims at developing a sustainable framework for Community Policing that effectively addresses and promotes seamless collaboration between the police and the community, for which it will deliver a real time two-way communication platform for citizens and police.

A total of 12 focus groups, 6 with LEAs and 6 with citizens, were conducted in 6 European cities, each one having one of each. By having a wide diversity of participants in both cases, recruiters minimized several factors that could have biased the discussion such as age, rank, years of experience and division for LEAs whereas for citizens background, age, sex and previous knowledge of CP programs. The cities where fieldwork was conducted were Athens (Greece), Belfast (UK), Nicosia (Cyprus) Groningen (the Netherlands), Preston, UK and Valencia (Spain).

Around the dimension of 'desirability', the participants gave a positive feedback: they highlighted that CP officers were 'part of the community', valued positively the face to face contact, and the closeness to the citizens. The consensus around the concept of community policing was focus on crime prevention, which was achieved through mechanisms like meetings, talks, and mediation. This allows them to gather intelligence that can prove to be useful for prevention as it allows the LEA to monitor real or potential conflicts and act accordingly before crime takes place. Furthermore, this information can also be used for mediation purposes, something which is fundamental in CP programs. Nevertheless, LEAs have had to adapt to new challenges and feel it has been themselves as individuals rather than the institutions who have had to keep up with the changes in an environment of growing financial constraints. Budget cuts and lack of resources has been a major difficulty for the effective application of CP programs.

Regarding the 'acceptability' axis, CP programs have been positively reviewed by the citizens. Many participants can recall a case where CP has been effective, and value highly its deterrent effect. There is also general awareness of successful mediation programs run by the police. By and large CP has had good effects in conflicting neighbourhoods whenever implemented, despite the budget cuts of which citizens are also aware. According to the participants, the engagement of the community is satisfactory except for certain age groups and minorities. Even though CP programs may benefit both police organizations and citizenry, the results show that there is no educational program offered to LEAs that covers all relevant aspects to CP. Some participants have taken courses on their own which address the particular skillset and knowledge needed in CP which may range from psychology, communication or mediation, to public housing or community management.

The 'ethics' dimension reveals that community building relies on defending a set of shared values that facilitate the coexistence. Resilience, trust and a culture of cooperation are some of the values remarked by the participants. Citizens admit that many times it is the community itself who requires to be properly educated and they demand an education program, run by the municipality, which would work both ways, thus creating clusters of citizens that can help as observants for the police and holding regular meetings where there would be an exchange of information. All LEA groups remark the absence of a concrete framework in which CP duties take place. There are some guidelines that may be established occasionally according to



the ward/area, but from the institution standpoint, the line between CP and normal policing is today rather blurry. With regard to citizens' participation, this issue prompted many doubts and questions amongst those participants less acquainted with CP and those who show general criticism towards the police force. They stress the importance of anonymity when contacting the police as it is crucial avoiding the idea of "snitching". Participants understand there is a lot of work to do on the part of authorities and political powers in order to create, first, a logical framework in which CP activities can be undertaken, and second, a culture of cooperation amongst police professionals and citizens alike.

Concerning 'data management', there is a lot of confusion and lack of information as to how data is, can or should be managed. On the one hand all participants understand that technology is developing at an ever faster pace and they need to keep up with it. In their view, ICT innovations offer virtually limitless real and potential solutions, but they admit there are many grey areas in terms of usability and privacy. All LEA focus groups demand more technical support and better management with regards to technological platforms which would allow real-time contact between LEAs and citizens. Issues like data protection and privacy raise many doubts amongst participants, especially questions related to uses of phone-taken images as evidence, anonymity of informants or use of social media. LEAs adopt a broad common sense stance towards these issue. Citizens demands and expectations revolve around the problem of oversight and ethics, more specifically, questioning who manages the data and what will they do with it. They state that in an ideal world citizens should not have any problem when sharing information with the police, but they are aware that the system does not function at its best as of yet, which adds up to certain general confusion as to how new technologies are bringing about issues related to privacy. Increasing concerns are related to the fact that new technologies provide a wider range of means for the management of documentation, like evidences, in different multimedia formats (video, pictures, audio, text, etc.). The management of virtual communities and social media accounts are also concerning questions, and citizens have also raised some concerns regarding the potential increase of surveillance. A last topic is the ownership of the used devices, and the potential utilization of own devices (e.g. mobile phones or social media accounts).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Community policing is seen as an effective means of policing in the context of growing diversity in communities and less resources for public services. Technology and community collaboration can overcome the constraints of less agents on the ground. Nevertheless, these initiatives have to work in building mutual trust between community and police forces. Education and communication are key factors, and youngsters are a key social group that has to be reached if the service is to be successful. Technology raises a lot of expectations to balance the lack of resources. However, it generates certain confusion as participants feel it moves at a fast pace

difficult to keep up with, which raises some new challenges related to privacy and fundamental rights amongst citizens. In order to ensure a successful implementation of ICT-mediated community policing resources, the following aspects are to be taken into account.

### ***Relevance***

Clear needs, goals and demands have to be detected. The resulting tool should be able to channelize the actual safety needs and demands of the benefited communities, in order to jointly define relevant and broad-embracing safety strategies. These needs, goals and demands define the functionalities of the resulting tools and thus, the proportional and relevant balance between benefits and drawbacks, risks and opportunities. The decision-making procedures in the project should reflect the idea that technology is a means, not a goal itself.

### ***Empowerment***

In order to comply with the participative nature of CP, the preferences of both LEAs and citizenry have to be taken into account. The effective empowerment of citizens, both as individuals but also as members of the existing communities (emphasizing them as a plurality of groups) should encourage their active engagement into the social structures and networks. Moreover, the benefits have to be equally distributed, and not being concentrated by specific groups (e.g. specific end-users, privileged communities, providers and developers).

### ***Stakeholders***

A wide scope of stakeholders has to be considered in order to address a community integrally: different types of LEAs at different levels of the command chain (CP officers, patrol unit officers, etc.); policymakers and civil servants; social workers; members of the public (community leaders and mediators, young people and elderly people, housewives/men, repeat offenders...); involved industry members (technology and telecommunications providers).

## *Context*

It is important to bear in mind the spatial and temporal conditions that will affect the functioning of the system. The scalability and modularity depicted in the theoretical design has to be concordant with the actual time and place where the tools are to be deployed. Different administrative levels may be implied and the limits of interoperability (especially regarding the sharing of data) have to be defined and respected. On the other hand, it has to be conveniently studied to which extent the online/virtual communities play a meaningful role in the project.

## *Trust*

Democratic values as transparency and accountability as well as the corresponding oversight mechanisms should not be seen as trade-offs or obstacles for an effective policing strategy. Trust is a key value that should be conceived as a goal itself, and not just as a means to achieve the active collaboration of citizens. Damaged trust between citizens and police, inside a specific community, or between different communities/neighbourhoods may even initiate additional security problems and conflicts. Individualist attitudes derived from this damage erode the social tissue sustained by the communities.

## *Agency and Participation*

Differing involvement levels available for citizenry may co-exist. Yet undesired or involuntary involvement is strongly discouraged. Moreover, different engagement levels should not imply individual nor social benefits (beyond the satisfaction of the participation and collaboration) or disadvantages. The undesired involvement can occur in a subtle way, since crowd-sourced tasks may be ineffective: defamation and false accusations are a major risk in this sense. Both victims' and offenders' information has to be respectfully managed, but also unconnected citizens should have the option to remain unaffected.

## *Safety First*

Even though citizens are asked to collaborate and to some extent, they are legally obliged to do so, the involvement of citizens in security tasks has to be limited. Otherwise, disproportionate risks could be assumed by community members that are not prepared or legally entitled for certain high risk actions or involvements

(violence utilization, investigative actions, etc.). Injuries, threats and even death are plausible risks related to the inadequate understanding of the integration of citizens into security contexts.

### ***Anonymity***

The anonymous interaction through ICTs should not be perceived as a drawback. Moreover, it could make people more willing to participate and collaborate. Anonymity of both the informing party and the affected party has to be respected, as well as the identity of police officers out of the policing context. Conditioning the utilization of a tool to the revelation of personal data (e.g. geolocalization) has to be justified, in the sense that the functionalities demand it as an unavoidable requirement. The risk of misuse like providing false hints, if conveniently managed, may be minor than the consequences of processing personal data that is not essential for the effective functioning of a tool.

### ***Social Media***

Responsible stakeholders have to be aware of the types of information circulating, which has to be relevant to the needs, goals and demands, as well as compliant to the legal framework. Through social media environments, police forces may post and circulate awareness-oriented information (i.e., security-related social media information) which can be managed by both LEAs and internet users; but they may also perform social media crawling and reutilize the information found. Circulating other persons' contents may endanger data protection rights and copyright, and it could end up circulating false facts and rumours. For this reason, social media reutilization of other's contents by both LEAs and citizens has to be carried out with precaution or directly avoided.

### ***Accessibility***

Usability and simplicity of functions help to achieve the relevant goals as well as to compensate for the regulation complexity. Technology has not to be developed for the sake of technology, just due to the availability of options and resources. Different access to knowledge and to technological resources should not be translated into

different access to security and participation. Discrimination may occur if these questions are not taken into account: digital divides, cultural and social aspects (e.g. languages), unavailability for disabled people, etc.

## Resources

Any ICT-based tool must ensure the long-term sustainability and maintenance. Allocating the necessary resources is a key requirement for the success of the resulting tools. Additionally, officers should have the convenient material and cognitive resources in order to be able to respond to the different situations, without having to make use of their own private means. Past experiences reveal that efforts for the introduction of innovative technologies in policing may be unsuccessful if they are not also supported by an adequate follow-up plan. Especially important is the training of staff upon a wide perspective: not only regarding the utilization of technologies but also acquiring behavioural patterns (e.g. by codes of conduct) that allow to take advantage of the tools at the most. This knowledge has to be transferable, adaptable and understandable.

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