

Policing “the other”: vulnerable communities’ experiences with the police

Call for applications: 10th GERN Summer School

Hosted by: Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and Ghent University (UGent)

Location: Brussels

Date: Monday 2nd June 2025 – Thursday 5th June 2025

Contact hours: 27 hours (during 4 days)

“Othering” is the process of naming and marking those thought to be different from oneself (Weis, 1995), a process which involves using stereotypes and representations about “the other” when meeting them and talking about them (Dervin, 2016). The phenomenon of “othering” usually affects minorities including ethnic, gender and racial minorities, and involves unequal power relations.

In police research, othering can surface as a conceptual lens in studies related to police diversity, police legitimacy, relations between the police and young people with a migration background (Murphy, 2017), ethnic profiling (Plümecke et al., 2022), and stop and search practices (Solhjell et al., 2018). The conceptual framework also includes work on police responses to gender-based violence (Jordan, 2022), sex workers, FLINTA, as well as police work in the context of extremism, Covid-19 containment measures or border management.

We are pleased to invite PhD researchers and early-career scholars from all over the world to apply for the 10th GERN Summer School, organized by Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and Ghent University (UGent). The central theme is policing “the other”: vulnerable communities’ experiences with the police.

The summer school will explore the dynamics related to “othering” in police practices: how do law enforcement professionals interact with “the other” and how are vulnerable communities experiencing these interactions? Invited speakers for the summer school are Abdessamad Bouabid, Bisi Akintoye, Charlotte De Kock, Fabien Jobard and Jacques de Maillard. A more detailed program will appear during the month of January 2025.

Objectives of the Summer School

The course will focus on the theoretical and empirical work related to the summer school’s central topic and will offer methodology workshops suited to address the ethical and methodological challenges of researching communities that experience marginalization or are difficult to reach. Participants will engage in theoretical discussions on “othering” and power imbalances and learn how to implement innovative research methods in their own work.

Key objectives include:

- Exploring various methodologies in police studies, with a specific interest in qualitative research methods and the difficulties associated with searching for hard-to-access respondents and groups.
- Provide theoretical insights into the processes of 'othering' (ex. labelling, critical race, police legitimacy, etc. and multi-disciplinary approaches)
- Stimulating ethical considerations when working with marginalized populations in police research
- Encourage participants to reflect on their research projects through workshops and interactive sessions

The summer school will include:

- Individual paper presentations by all participants, including comments provided by two members of the summer school team
- Theoretical sessions on othering and doing research with vulnerable and hard-to-reach target groups within police studies, from leading experts in policing studies and participatory research
- Workshops, interactive sessions, with room for discussion and feedback, about creative and participatory methods
- Networking opportunities with scholars from diverse institutions and countries
- Informal activities

Audience

The summer school is designed for PhD researchers and early-career scholars in criminology, sociology and broader social sciences related fields who are working on or interested in research involving the police, and vulnerable or marginalized communities. Prior knowledge of the methods discussed is not required, but participants should have a clear research focus and proficiency in English.

Application process

PhD researchers who are (interested in) researching vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations within policing studies, are invited to apply. Each applicant must submit a concise dossier containing their CVs and an extended abstract (1000 words) of their original empirical research. After having received acceptance to the summer school, participants are expected to write a first full draft prior to the event. They are also required to present their papers during the event. After the summer school, a joint book is prepared containing (some of) the full papers conceived in the process. These papers will undergo double blind peer-review before publication.

Key dates

- 1 February: dossier, including an extended abstract (1000 words) and a CV
- 1 March: notification of acceptance,
- 1 May: deadline for sending the first full draft
- 2-5 June: Summer school
- 20 June: notification of written observations from two reviewers
- 1 September: deadline for sending the second draft
- 15 September final decision on the acceptance. Possibly, sending the second draft to an external reviewer for final comments.

For more information or to submit your application, please contact gernsummerschool2025@vub.be