



WORICA

Women inclusion and empowerment
through collage art

WORICA

International Report on Gender Equality and Inclusion

**Comparative analysis – Sweden, France, Italy, Spain, Austria and
Greece**

Prepared by the WORICA partnership

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CEIPES

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About this report

Women inclusion and empowerment through collage art.

This International Report was prepared by the partners of **WORICA – Women inclusion and empowerment through collage art**, an Erasmus+ adult-education partnership (project 2025-1-SE01-KA220-ADU-000350853) bringing together Folkuniversitetet (Sweden), Brûlant·e·s (France), CEIPES ETS (Italy), Fractals – Art Education (Spain), ÖJAB (Austria) and SOFFA – Social Fashion Factory (Greece).

It compares the six national gender-equality contexts documented in the WORICA national reports: constitutional guarantees and key laws, national strategies and action plans, competent authorities, women’s rights and protection mechanisms, social inclusion measures and support services, key indicators, main challenges and intersectional vulnerabilities. Together with the national reports it forms the evidence base of the WORICA EU Gender Equality Handbook.

The information reflects the situation at the time of writing (2026). Laws, services and data change; readers are encouraged to verify current information with the authorities and organisations cited.

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Introduction

Gender equality has progressively consolidated its status as a foundational principle within European legal systems, yet its translation into effective rights and lived realities remains uneven and context-dependent. The analysis of national legal frameworks, therefore, constitutes a critical entry point for understanding how equality is conceptualised, institutionalised, and operationalised across different jurisdictions. Rather than being limited to formal declarations, contemporary gender equality policies are embedded within complex legal architectures that combine constitutional norms, legislative instruments, and sector-specific regulations.

Sweden, Austria, France, Spain, Italy, and Greece are especially pertinent situations for collaborative analysis from this angle. At the EU level, all of the aforementioned nations have established comprehensive legal frameworks that address discrimination, labor rights, and gender-based violence, and they are all committed to equality as a fundamental right. At the national level, however, the laws' implementation layers and policies range greatly from one another. Analyzing the distinctions and similarities will lead to a deeper understanding of how the legal system addresses structural gender inequality within a common European framework.

Purpose and Scope of the Report

This report aims to provide a detailed examination of the legal frameworks governing gender equality, particularly in Austria, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Sweden, and in Europe on a large scale, to identify both structural features and dynamic trends.

Important human rights treaties and EU directives on gender equality in leadership, compensation, and working conditions are described in the International Commitments and EU Directives section. The **National Context and Legal Framework** section describes how anti-discrimination laws and constitutional principles have shaped national laws. The section on **National Strategies and Action Plans** explains how nations implement laws through goals, coordinated efforts, and oversight. It also emphasizes the function of specialized government agencies in advancing equality and preventing violence and discrimination. Policies that support inclusion, equal opportunity, and anti-discrimination protection are reviewed in the **Social Inclusion Measures and Policies for Vulnerable Groups** section. Counseling, legal assistance, and referral services for victims of gender-based violence and discrimination are included in the **Support Services** section. The Gender Equality Index, female employment rate, and gender pay gap are among the key indicators used to gauge progress that are presented in the **Key Indicators** section. The structural, cultural, and resource barriers that endure in spite of robust legal frameworks are covered in the **Main Challenges** section. The section on

intersectional vulnerabilities looks at how prejudice is exacerbated by overlapping characteristics like gender, race, immigration status, disability, or social class.

The report highlights similar patterns by focusing on Austria, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Sweden. Despite operating within the same European legislative framework, the six nations differ greatly in terms of their organizations, management, operations, and general national characteristics. This paper uses a comprehensive approach to examine both similarities and differences.

Methodology and Approach

The analysis is based on a qualitative methodology grounded in the systematic examination of national context reports produced as part of the WORICA project. It is based on national reports drafted by the consortium partners representing six different European countries. These documents are primary sources because they compile and synthesize official legal provisions, legislative developments, and institutional arrangements for each national context. The specific resources used for this international report are all listed in the footnotes.

The methodological approach combines descriptive and analytical dimensions. On the one hand, it provides a structured presentation of constitutional guarantees, legal frameworks, and key legislative instruments. On the other hand, it interprets these elements to identify underlying patterns, such as the degree of legal integration, the balance between protection and promotion, and the emergence of new regulatory tools.

The comparative dimension is central to the analysis. Italy, Spain, Sweden, Greece, France and Austria are examined through parallel thematic categories: constitutional foundations, legislative frameworks, and key laws allowing for a consistent and systematic comparison. This approach facilitates the identification of similarities in normative commitments while also revealing differences in legal design, policy orientation, and regulatory complexity.

Rather than adopting a purely descriptive inventory of laws, the report emphasises the internal logic of each legal system, considering how different instruments interact and how they contribute to the broader objective of achieving gender equality.

Overview of Partner Countries

Italy, Spain, Greece, Sweden, Austria, and France all demonstrate a strong formal commitment to gender equality, anchored in their constitutional systems and reinforced by a broad range of legislative measures. In all contexts, equality is framed not only as a legal principle but also as a policy objective requiring active intervention by public authorities.

The development of gender equality law reflects a gradual and cumulative process in which successive legislative measures have progressively expanded the scope of intervention. The legal framework has evolved from an initial focus on fundamental rights and labour protection

toward a more diversified system addressing multiple dimensions of inequality, including corporate governance, social inclusion, and gender-based violence. This evolution suggests a transition from a predominantly protective logic to a more proactive and incentive-based approach, in which legal instruments are used to promote behavioural and organisational change.

These mentioned countries present structured and systematised models, characterised by a clear hierarchy of legal norms and a high degree of legislative density. The distinction between organic laws, ordinary laws, and regulatory instruments allows for a differentiated regulation of equality-related issues, with organic laws playing a central role in defining and protecting fundamental rights. This legal architecture is complemented by a strong institutional framework, including a dedicated Ministry of Equality responsible for coordination and implementation.

All countries share a commitment to addressing gender inequality; their differing legal structures reflect distinct approaches to governance and policy integration.

International Commitments and EU Directives

The legal systems of Austria, France, Italy, Spain, and Sweden are based on international human rights treaties. These commitments have become the foundation for rules in the European Union, which has been the main driver for legislative modernization throughout the rest of Europe. EU legislation has effectively harmonised standards for fair remuneration, non-discrimination, and work-life balance, thereby bridging the divide between various national customs. The foundational principles for gender equality legal action are the various directives of EU law on employment, gender balance, pay transparency, and equal pay.

The Employment and Occupation Recast Directive 2006/54/EC is the basic recast instruction that integrated prior legislation on equal opportunity and workplace treatment and served as the ground for all later gender equality litigation.

The Gender Balance in Corporate Governance [Directive (EU) 2022/2381] sets out clear targets for women on boards of publicly listed companies, taking the corporate leadership issue from a private policy issue to a public legal obligation.

Pay Transparency & Enforcement [Directive (EU) 2023/970] is a crucial step towards ending the ‘black box’ of corporate compensation by requiring companies to disclose transparent pay structures and strengthening enforcement of ‘equal pay for work of equal value’.

Equal pay for men and women for the same work or work of equal value [Directive (EU) 2023/970] and the Council of May 10 to reinforce through mechanisms for enforcement and pay transparency.

The directives are a two-edged tool. They are constraints that set minimum standards but also

a motor that pushes member states to set higher legal standards. These directives, while promoting the gradual convergence of employment equality law, allow for national flexibility and for each country to interpret EU principles through the lens of its own legal heritage.

This multi-level governance framework results in a continual feedback loop in which norms are negotiated at the international level, modified at the European level, and then incorporated into state statutes.

National Contexts and Legal Frameworks

The national legal frameworks of the partner countries are characterised by their complexity and multi-layered organisation, combining constitutional principles with a wide array of legislative instruments. These frameworks have not emerged as static systems but have developed over time in response to evolving social demands, political priorities, and normative influences.

The legal framework demonstrates a progressive expansion in both scope and depth. Initially grounded in constitutional guarantees, it has gradually incorporated a diverse set of legislative measures addressing specific aspects of gender inequality. This includes labour law provisions, anti-discrimination regulations, and criminal law measures targeting gender-based violence. The evolution of the framework reflects a growing recognition of the need to address not only formal discrimination but also structural and systemic inequalities.

The legal system is distinguished by its formal structuring and comprehensive coverage. The coexistence of different types of laws allows for a nuanced regulation of equality issues across multiple domains. Organic laws, which regulate fundamental rights, in particular, serve as key instruments for regulating fundamental rights, while ordinary laws and decree-laws address more specific or technical aspects. This layered approach enables the integration of gender equality considerations into a wide range of policy areas, from employment and health to political representation and social inclusion.

In all countries, the legal frameworks reflect an ongoing process of adaptation and refinement, illustrating the dynamic nature of gender equality as a legal and policy field.

Constitutional Guarantees and Legal Foundations

Constitutional provisions constitute the normative core of gender equality frameworks in all countries, establishing binding principles that guide legislative and policy developments. These provisions not only prohibit discrimination but also define the role of the state in promoting equality.

In Italy, for example, the Constitution of 1948 articulates a comprehensive vision of equality that encompasses both formal and substantive dimensions. It affirms equality before the law, guarantees equal rights and remuneration in employment, and promotes equal access to

public office. Importantly, these provisions imply an active obligation on the part of public authorities to remove barriers that hinder the full participation of women in social, economic, and political life.

In Spain, the Constitution of 1978 similarly establishes equality as a fundamental right, with Article 14 explicitly prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex and other characteristics. This provision serves as a central reference point for the development of subsequent legislation, ensuring that all legal measures align with the principle of non-discrimination.

In the other European contexts, constitutional guarantees function as more than symbolic declarations; they provide a legal foundation that shapes the entire regulatory framework and legitimises further legislative intervention.

Key Gender Equality Laws

The legal framework in Italy, Spain, Greece, Sweden, France, and Austria is characterized by a cumulative and sectoral evolution, in which successive legislative interventions have progressively expanded both the scope and depth of gender equality regulation.

The Italian system is composed of a constellation of laws addressing specific domains such as employment, family policy, and protection against violence. This incremental approach has allowed for a high degree of adaptability, enabling the legal system to respond to emerging issues through targeted reforms. At the same time, it results in a certain degree of fragmentation, requiring coordination across multiple legal instruments to ensure coherence and effectiveness.

Spain presents a highly structured and hierarchical legislative model, in which the distinction between organic laws and ordinary laws plays a central role. This architecture enables a comprehensive and integrated approach, in which different dimensions of equality are addressed within a coherent legal system.

Austria adopts a model that combines constitutional guarantees with a strong emphasis on specialized anti-discrimination legislation. This framework is characterized by its clarity and enforceability, with well-defined rights, obligations, and remedies. Moreover, the Austrian model places particular emphasis on institutional enforcement, ensuring that legal norms are supported by mechanisms capable of monitoring compliance and facilitating access to justice.

Greece's system has been shaped by long-term interactions with EU laws and policies. Its framework has evolved with a particular structural dynamic. Consequently, the Greek system exhibits a high level of formal compliance with European legal criteria.

A universal understanding of equality has historically served as the foundation for the French model. France is seeking to advance substantive equality through a number of legislative reforms. Therefore, France's trajectory is doing a shift from a mostly formal and universalist paradigm to a hybrid system that combines normative principles with targeted corrective procedures and regulatory enforcement.

The Swedish framework is founded on the idea of equality, which must be structurally ingrained in all facets of public policies due to its systematic coherence and integration within

the border welfare state. The legal aspect of this model is closely linked to proactive obligations imposed on public institutions and private actors. The Swedish system's focus on prevention is one of its distinguishing features. Redistributing social duties and obligations is one way that policies aim to address the underlying causes of inequality.

Taken together, these six models illustrate different pathways toward the same objective: the transformation of formal equality into effective and enforceable rights.

Italy: Evolution of Gender Equality Legislation

The evolution of gender equality legislation in Italy reflects a broader transformation in the understanding of equality itself, moving from a protective and compensatory approach toward a more proactive and structural perspective. This trajectory can be understood as a gradual shift from the protection of women as a vulnerable group to the promotion of equality as a systemic objective requiring intervention across multiple domains.

In its earlier phases, Italian legislation focused primarily on safeguarding women's rights in the labour market, particularly in relation to maternity and working conditions. These measures were essential in establishing basic protections, but they remained limited in scope, addressing specific forms of discrimination without fundamentally altering underlying structural inequalities.

The adoption of more comprehensive legislative instruments, such as the Equal Opportunities Code, marked a significant turning point by introducing a more coherent and general framework for addressing discrimination. This shift was accompanied by an increasing recognition of the need to move beyond formal equality toward substantive equality, requiring active measures to correct imbalances and promote equal participation.

Recent developments further illustrate this transformation. The introduction of gender quotas in corporate governance represents a direct intervention aimed at addressing underrepresentation in decision-making positions. Similarly, the implementation of gender equality certification systems reflects a move toward incentive-based regulation, encouraging organisations to adopt internal policies and practices that promote equality. These mechanisms indicate a growing reliance on regulatory innovation, combining legal obligations with economic and reputational incentives.

The growth in criminal law provisions concerning gender-based violence also points to the extension of the legal framework into areas traditionally outside the domain of equality law. On November 25, 2025, Italy amended its Criminal Code, adding Article 577-bis that defines femicide as a separate crime, punishable by life imprisonment. This integrated approach is based on the understanding that gender inequality is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and that coordinated action is needed across the various branches of law.

Spain: Comprehensive Organic and Ordinary Laws

Spain's approach to gender equality legislation is distinguished by its high level of formalisation, coherence, and comprehensiveness. The use of organic laws as primary instruments for regulating fundamental rights provides a strong and stable normative

foundation, ensuring that gender equality is embedded at the highest level of the legal hierarchy.

These organic laws address a wide range of issues, including gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights, and equal representation in political and public life. Their scope extends beyond prohibiting discrimination to include proactive measures to transform social structures and address systemic inequalities. This reflects a conception of equality that is both substantive and transformative, seeking not only to guarantee rights but also to reshape the conditions under which those rights are exercised.

An important feature of the Spanish framework is its explicit incorporation of an intersectional perspective. Legislative instruments recognise that gender inequality often intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as those based on migration status, disability, or socio-economic conditions. This recognition enables more targeted and differentiated policy responses and enhances the effectiveness of legal measures.

The role of ordinary laws and royal decree-laws is equally significant, as they provide the operational detail necessary to implement the principles established by organic laws. In particular, these instruments play a crucial role in regulating labour market equality, defining obligations for employers, and establishing enforcement mechanisms.

Overall, the Spanish model can be characterised as a highly integrated and multi-level system in which different types of legislation interact to produce a comprehensive and coherent framework for gender equality.

Austria: Federal Constitutional Act and Equal Treatment Laws

Austria's legal framework for gender equality is characterised by a strong emphasis on clarity, enforceability, and institutional support. The Federal Constitutional Act establishes equality as a fundamental principle, explicitly mandating the promotion of de facto equality between women and men. This constitutional commitment provides a clear normative basis for legislative and policy action.

The Equal Treatment Act represents the central legislative instrument, offering a detailed and structured approach to anti-discrimination law. It defines protected grounds, specifies areas of application, and establishes legal remedies for individuals who experience discrimination. This level of precision contributes to the effectiveness of the legal framework, ensuring that rights are not only recognised but also enforceable in practice.

A distinctive feature of the Austrian model is its strong institutional dimension. Bodies such as the Equal Treatment Commission and the Ombud Office play a crucial role in monitoring compliance, providing guidance, and supporting individuals in accessing justice. This institutional infrastructure enhances the practical implementation of legal norms, bridging the gap between formal rights and real-world outcomes.

In addition, Austria places significant emphasis on gender mainstreaming as a strategic principle. This approach requires that gender considerations be systematically integrated into all areas of public policy, moving beyond isolated interventions toward a more holistic and preventive model of equality governance.

Greece: EU-Aligned Legal Framework

The Greek legal framework for gender equality is best understood as a system shaped through sustained interaction with European Union law and policy. Rather than emerging from a long-standing domestic tradition of equality legislation, the framework has developed through successive phases of alignment with supranational standards, particularly since Greece's deeper integration into European governance structures.

This process has led to the incorporation of core principles such as equal treatment, non-discrimination, and gender mainstreaming into national law. Legislative reforms have frequently followed the transposition of EU directives, especially in areas such as employment equality, social protection, and protection against discrimination. As a result, the Greek system demonstrates a high degree of formal compliance with European legal requirements.

However, this alignment-based trajectory also introduces specific structural dynamics. Legal innovation in Greece tends to be externally catalysed, often reflecting European priorities and timelines rather than domestically driven policy agendas. This can result in a framework that is normatively robust but operationally uneven, particularly when institutional capacity and administrative coordination are limited.

Furthermore, the reliance on transposition mechanisms may lead to challenges in contextual adaptation, as European norms are integrated into a national system that must address its own socio-economic specificities. Consequently, Greece's model can be characterised by strong normative convergence combined with ongoing efforts to enhance implementation effectiveness and policy coherence.

France: Historical and Modern Legal Trajectory

France's legal trajectory in the field of gender equality reflects a complex interplay between deeply rooted constitutional principles and progressively interventionist public policies. The French model is historically grounded in a universalist conception of equality, derived from republican ideals that emphasise the indivisibility and neutrality of the law.

While this framework ensures a strong formal commitment to equality before the law, it has gradually been supplemented by more targeted legislative measures designed to address persistent and structural inequalities. This evolution reflects a growing recognition that formal equality alone is insufficient to correct entrenched disparities in areas such as employment, political representation, and access to decision-making positions.

Over time, France has introduced a series of legislative innovations aimed at promoting substantive equality. These include parity laws in political institutions, obligations for companies to implement gender equality measures, and mechanisms to monitor and reduce pay gaps. Such measures illustrate a shift toward a more regulatory and interventionist approach, in which the state plays a central role in shaping organisational behaviour and ensuring compliance.

At the same time, the French framework has expanded to include strengthened legal responses to gender-based violence, integrating criminal law, social policy, and prevention strategies.

This reflects an increasingly holistic understanding of gender equality as a multi-dimensional issue requiring coordinated action across different sectors.

France's trajectory can thus be interpreted as a transition from a predominantly formal and universalist model toward a hybrid system combining normative principles with targeted corrective mechanisms and regulatory enforcement.

Sweden: Systemic and Preventive Gender Equality Model

Sweden's approach to gender equality stands out for its systemic coherence and its integration within the broader welfare state architecture. Unlike models that rely primarily on legislative accumulation or corrective interventions, the Swedish framework is based on the principle that equality must be embedded structurally within all aspects of public policy and social organization.

The legal dimension of this model is closely intertwined with proactive obligations placed on public institutions and private actors. Rather than focusing solely on prohibiting discrimination, Swedish law requires active measures to promote equality, including the development of action plans, regular monitoring, and institutional accountability mechanisms.

A defining characteristic of the Swedish system is its emphasis on prevention. Policies are designed to address the root causes of inequality, particularly through the redistribution of social roles and responsibilities. For example, extensive parental leave schemes and accessible childcare services are not merely social policies but integral components of the gender equality framework, enabling a more balanced participation of women and men in both professional and domestic spheres.

Gender mainstreaming operates as a central organising principle, ensuring that equality considerations are systematically incorporated into policy design, budgeting, and evaluation processes. This results in a highly coordinated governance model in which legal, social, and economic instruments function in a complementary manner.

Sweden therefore represents a paradigm of integrated and anticipatory governance, where gender equality is not treated as a discrete policy area but as a fundamental dimension of the entire public policy system.

Divergences in Legal Innovations (Expanded Comparative Perspective)

The comparison of Italy, Spain, Greece, France, Sweden, and Austria reveals a spectrum of approaches to legal innovation in gender equality, shaped by distinct legal traditions and governance models. These divergences are not incidental but reflect different conceptions of how law should function in addressing complex social inequalities.

Italy's incremental approach prioritises adaptability, allowing the legal system to respond to emerging issues through targeted reforms. However, this flexibility may come at the cost of systemic coherence, as the accumulation of measures can create a fragmented regulatory landscape.

Spain's model, in contrast, is characterised by comprehensive legislative design. Innovation is embedded within large-scale legal instruments that address multiple dimensions simultaneously. This ensures internal consistency but also increases the complexity of the legal system, requiring significant institutional capacity for implementation.

Austria's emphasis on institutional integration shifts the focus from legislative expansion to effective enforcement and policy coordination. Innovation is expressed through the strengthening of implementation mechanisms and the systematic application of gender mainstreaming principles.

When extending the comparison, Greece introduces a model of externally driven innovation, where legal developments are closely aligned with European directives. While this ensures conformity with supranational standards, it may limit the emergence of context-specific policy solutions and reduce the scope for domestic experimentation.

France represents a model of state-led corrective innovation, combining a strong constitutional tradition with increasingly interventionist regulatory measures. Legal innovation in this context is driven by the objective of transforming structural inequalities through binding obligations and institutional oversight.

Sweden, finally, exemplifies a model of systemic and preventive innovation, where changes are integrated into a broader policy ecosystem. Rather than focusing on discrete legal reforms, the Swedish approach emphasises long-term structural transformation through coordinated policy design.

These models illustrate different balances between flexibility, coherence, and effectiveness. They also highlight the importance of institutional capacity and governance structures in determining how legal innovation translates into tangible outcomes.

National Strategies and Action Plans

Beyond legislative frameworks, national strategies and action plans constitute a central component of gender equality governance in all six countries. These instruments translate legal principles into operational priorities, bridging the gap between normative commitments and concrete policy outcomes.

National strategies typically serve multiple functions. First, they provide a coherent framework for policy action, defining strategic objectives and identifying priority areas. Second, they facilitate coordination across different levels of government and policy sectors, ensuring that gender equality is addressed in a transversal manner. Third, they establish mechanisms for

monitoring and evaluation, increasingly based on quantitative indicators and measurable targets.

In the cases of partner countries, these strategies reflect a shift toward more integrated and results-oriented approaches. Rather than relying solely on legal compliance, they emphasise the effectiveness of policies in producing tangible improvements in areas such as employment, representation, and protection against violence.

At the same time, the design and implementation of these strategies vary significantly, reflecting differences in institutional capacity, governance structures, and policy traditions.

Common Priorities Across Countries

Despite national specificities, a comparative analysis reveals a strong convergence in the substantive priorities addressed by gender equality strategies in Italy, Spain, Austria, France, Greece, and Sweden. This convergence is largely shaped by shared socio-economic challenges and the influence of European policy frameworks.

At present, Spain, Italy, and France are striving to bridge the power gap, with gender parity in decision-making as the primary goal. The implementation of the Women on Boards Directive by June 2026 remains their main objective.¹ In addition to corporate boards, the three were pioneers in extending quotas to sports leadership and public administration.

Austria, Greece, and Italy are putting in big efforts to increase labour market participation and reduce the gender wage gap. Austria and Italy are actively working towards institutionalizing pay transparency, with the intention of moving away from informal salary negotiations, which disproportionately impact women.² Based on recent publication from the European Commission Greece continues to have one of the largest gender occupation gaps in the EU. The occupation of women is 17.4% lower than men, with the Commission attributing this problem to the lack of care services available for the elderly and the children. (Kathimerini 06.06.2026 Available at: [Παραβιάζει την εργατική νομοθεσία το 25% των επιχειρήσεων | Η ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ](#))

Sweden, Spain, and Austria are at the forefront of redefining the domain of time, which is the balance of unpaid care work between men and women. Their main goal is to transform parental leave from a woman's right into a shared social responsibility.

While Sweden still sets the gold standard in gender mainstreaming, Spain has recently joined this group by introducing non-transferable paternity leave rules that are among the most aggressive in the EU.

Finally, there is a growing awareness of the importance of addressing intersectional vulnerabilities, though the extent to which this is explicitly embedded in policy frameworks varies across countries.

These common priorities are indicative of a broader convergence of national strategies towards European objectives, while allowing for differentiated approaches in implementation.

Country-Specific Strategies

While sharing common priorities, Italy, Spain, Greece, Sweden, France, and Austria develop distinct strategic approaches that reflect their institutional configurations and policy orientations.

Italy: National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2026

Italy's National Strategy for Gender Equality (2021–2026) is a major effort to bring together and rationalize a previously fragmented policy landscape. It gives a structured framework around key thematic areas such as employment, income, education, time use, and decision-making power. Italy was the first country in the world to adopt a specific law (Law 3/2018) and a National Plan to promote gender specificity in healthcare.

A major part of the strategy is the focus on measurable targets and performance indicators. This suggests a shift to a more results-oriented approach, where the effectiveness of policy is measured by quantifiable outcomes. The strategy also promotes the use of innovative tools such as gender equality certification for companies to incentivise voluntary compliance and organisational change.

Another important dimension is the focus on structural barriers, particularly in the labour market. Measures are designed not only to address immediate inequalities but also to influence long-term patterns, such as career progression and access to leadership positions.

Overall, the strategy illustrates Italy's move toward a more coordinated and forward-looking model of gender equality governance, combining regulatory intervention with incentive-based mechanisms.

Spain: State Pact Against Gender Violence

Spain's State Pact Against Gender Violence represents a central pillar of its national strategy, highlighting the priority given to addressing violence as a structural and systemic issue. The Pact is characterised by its comprehensive scope, encompassing legal reforms, institutional coordination, financial commitments, and awareness-raising measures.

A key strength of the Pact lies in its multi-level and multi-actor approach. It involves coordination between national, regional, and local authorities, as well as collaboration with civil society organisations. This reflects an understanding that effective responses to gender-based violence require integrated and sustained efforts across different sectors.

The Pact also emphasises prevention, recognising that long-term change depends on addressing underlying social and cultural factors. This includes educational initiatives and public awareness campaigns aimed at transforming attitudes and behaviours.

By combining legal, institutional, and social interventions, the Spanish approach demonstrates a high level of policy integration and strategic coherence.

Austria: National Action plans

The gender mainstreaming principle, which necessitates the systematic integration of gender considerations into all phases of policy creation, implementation, and evaluation, shapes

Austria's gender equality approach. This strategy, highlighted in Austria's Gender Mainstreaming Strategy in 2000, signaled a deliberate shift from reactive to preventive governance. Gender mainstreaming tries to anticipate and alleviate inequities through policy and program design, rather than addressing them after they occur. To incorporate gender issues into decision-making processes, analytical tools, data-gathering mechanisms, and administrative capacity had to be developed.

The National Action Plan for Gender Equality in the Labour Market (2001-2003) was a key follow-up to the 2000 strategy, translating mainstreaming concepts into tangible measures and contributing to long-term structural changes in employment and labour market policy. This early National Action Plan is a key component of the Austrian model, although it is sometimes overlooked in bigger overviews. Austria has continued to use National Action Plans as targeted tools alongside mainstreaming, such as the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking in 2024-2027 and the National Action Plan of 2025-2029 to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls.

Institutional mechanisms remain central to the strategy. Dedicated bodies monitor implementation, provide guidance, and ensure accountability, while training and capacity-building initiatives equip public officials to apply gender-sensitive approaches. Overall, the Austrian model emphasises structural transformation by embedding gender equality as a cross-cutting principle across the policy system.

Greece: National Action Plan for Gender Equality

Greece's National Action Plan for Gender Equality reflects a strategic effort to consolidate policy initiatives within a coherent framework aligned with European priorities. The plan addresses key areas such as employment, social inclusion, education, and the prevention of gender-based violence, aiming to translate legal commitments into operational measures.

A central challenge addressed by the plan is the persistent gap between formal equality and actual socio-economic outcomes. Measures are therefore designed to improve women's participation in the labour market, enhance access to resources, and support vulnerable groups. Particular emphasis is placed on capacity-building and institutional coordination, recognising the need to strengthen implementation mechanisms across different levels of governance.

The plan also incorporates elements of gender mainstreaming, although their application remains uneven. While the strategic framework is comprehensive, its effectiveness depends largely on the ability of institutions to operationalise its objectives and ensure continuity over time.

France: Gender Equality Strategy

France's gender equality strategy is characterised by a strong emphasis on regulatory enforcement, policy coordination, and measurable impact. Building on an extensive legal framework, the strategy seeks to ensure that existing obligations are effectively implemented and that progress is systematically monitored.

Key areas of intervention include professional equality, the reduction of pay gaps, and the prevention of gender-based violence. The strategy relies on a combination of binding obligations, reporting requirements, and sanctions to ensure compliance, particularly in the private sector. This reflects a governance model in which the state actively shapes behaviour through regulation and oversight.

Another important dimension is the integration of gender equality into broader public policies, including education, health, and social protection. This transversal approach aims to address structural inequalities while maintaining a high level of policy coherence.

Overall, the French strategy illustrates a model of governance based on strong state involvement, regulatory instruments, and accountability mechanisms.

Sweden: National Gender Equality Policy Framework

Sweden's national strategy is structured around long-term objectives and supported by a high degree of institutional coherence. Gender equality is treated as a cross-cutting priority, with clearly defined goals related to economic independence, equal distribution of power, and the elimination of violence.

A key feature of the Swedish framework is its emphasis on prevention and structural change. Policies are designed to influence underlying social and economic dynamics, rather than merely addressing their consequences. This is reflected in the integration of equality considerations into areas such as labour market policy, family policy, and education.

The strategy is supported by robust monitoring systems and a strong culture of evaluation, ensuring that progress is continuously assessed and policies are adjusted accordingly. Institutional coordination is also highly developed, facilitating the consistent application of gender equality principles across different sectors.

Comparative Analysis of Strategic Focus Areas

Strategic priorities in the six countries are focused on a limited number of areas, but the ways in which they are implemented are based on different policy logics. Workplace equality, regulatory approaches, legislative frameworks, institutional enforcement, alignment-based policies, and structural welfare measures differ in France, Italy, Spain, Austria, Greece, and Sweden.

In many countries, the problem of gender-based violence is recognized as a serious issue, but the responses vary in their integrated and preventative focus. Spain and France have well-organized systems, but Sweden integrates preventive measures into wider social policies. Intersectional risks are identified, but integration is uneven, with some of the most advanced remedies in Spain and Sweden.

Finally, different levels of official intervention, from mandated quotas to indirect support measures, are needed to promote women's leadership and participation.

Workplace Equality

Workplace equality is addressed across all six countries through a combination of legal obligations and structural policies, but with distinct emphases.

France and Italy rely heavily on regulatory tools imposed on employers. For example, France requires companies to publish a gender equality index and take corrective measures if gaps persist, while Italy promotes gender equality certification to incentivise organisational change. Spain goes further by mandating equality plans in companies above a certain size, integrating pay transparency and career progression measures within a comprehensive legal framework.

In contrast, Sweden focuses on structural conditions. Generous parental leave schemes and accessible childcare systems enable a more balanced distribution of work and family responsibilities, reducing gender gaps indirectly. Austria emphasises legal enforcement, ensuring individuals can challenge discrimination through established bodies. Greece aligns with EU directives but faces implementation challenges, particularly in reducing persistent employment gaps.

Gender-Based Violence

All countries recognise gender-based violence as a structural issue, but policy responses vary in scope and integration.

Spain provides a highly comprehensive model, with its State Pact combining legal reforms, funding, and prevention strategies. France similarly integrates criminal law with prevention and victim support, including specialised services and awareness campaigns. Italy has strengthened its legal framework through reforms improving victim protection and judicial procedures, though coordination challenges remain. Austria focuses on access to protection and support services, backed by institutional mechanisms. Sweden emphasises prevention, incorporating education and social policies to address root causes. Greece follows EU standards, with efforts concentrated on improving institutional coordination and service delivery.

Intersectional Vulnerabilities

The integration of intersectionality differs significantly across countries. Spain and Sweden explicitly address multiple forms of discrimination. For example, Spanish legislation considers the situation of migrant women or women with disabilities in equality policies. Sweden integrates intersectionality into broader welfare and equality frameworks.

France is progressively incorporating this perspective, although its universalist legal tradition tends to avoid categorising groups explicitly. Italy addresses vulnerabilities through targeted measures, but without a fully integrated framework. Austria ensures protection through its anti-discrimination laws covering multiple grounds, while Greece is still developing more systematic approaches, particularly due to data and implementation constraints.

Women's Leadership and Representation

Approaches to increasing women's representation vary between binding measures and structural change. France and Spain use strong legal instruments. France applies parity laws in political representation, while Spain is trying to enforce balanced electoral lists to promote equality in public institutions. Italy has introduced quotas for corporate boards, significantly increasing women's participation in economic decision-making. Austria now requires 30% gender representation on supervisory boards for large and listed entities, shifting its strategy from gradual encouragement to targeted legislative mandates. Sweden achieves high representation levels largely through political culture and party practices rather than binding quotas. Greece has introduced measures to promote participation but continues to face structural barriers limiting women's access to leadership roles.

Competent Authorities and Equality Bodies

The efficacy of gender equality frameworks is strongly dependent on the institutional structures that implement them. Specialized bodies in France, Spain, Italy, Austria, Greece, and Sweden are responsible for monitoring compliance and offering a path to justice.

These countries benefit from robust, centralized organizations with extensive regulatory authority. Nonetheless, even with coordinated policy execution, they confront the difficulty of moving beyond procedural equality to address the lived reality of marginalized groups who are still disproportionately affected by intersectional discrimination.

Austria aims to establish legal responsibility by focusing on independent bodies with enforcement functions. However, the reliance on people to take legal action implies that many institutional hurdles go uncontested by those who lack the resources to navigate the judicial system.

While Sweden relies on highly integrated administrative systems that incorporate equality into general government, this approach can sometimes disguise ongoing structural disparities, as universalist policies may miss the special requirements of varied groups.

Italy has a more fragmented institutional structure, but Greece is increasing its administrative capability. In all cases, the gap between ambitious legal implementation and everyday enforcement remains significant, frequently leaving underprivileged groups unprotected in practice.

Finally, these variations demonstrate that institutional design is merely the first stage. Translating legal frameworks into long-term outcomes necessitates a direct confrontation with systemic and structural biases, such as racism and class-based exclusion, which frequently persist inside the very institutions intended to abolish them.

Central government ministries: Institution for gender equality and inclusion

To advance measures of gender equality and inclusion, all six countries established separate overlapping institutional frameworks at the central government level. These frameworks include dedicated ministries, specialist agencies, independent equality organizations, and procedures to encourage violence prevention, anti-discrimination, and border inclusion, including LGBTQIA+ and migrant integration.

Dedicated Ministries and High-Level Coordinating Bodies

Sweden incorporates gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, anti-racism, discrimination, and integration initiatives primarily through the Ministry of Employment. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency with 135 employees, established in 2018, supports all Ministry of Employment actions. It is a dedicated governmental body that monitors policy implementation and promotes gender equality and mainstreaming in agencies and universities, coordinates international exchanges, and oversees the national ten-year strategy to prevent and combat male violence against women.

Greece's General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights, based inside the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family, is in charge of developing, implementing, and monitoring national gender equality and human rights policies across all sectors.

Austria retains the Federal Ministry for Women's Affairs, which was formed in 1991 and focuses on violence against women, pay transparency, women's health, including tax breaks for hygiene goods and contraception, and other topics. A separate Division for Women's Affairs and Equality, with roughly 60 staff members spread across sub-divisions, is in charge of strategy, funding, equal treatment, violence prevention, and EU and international coordination.

Spain has a comprehensive Ministry of Equality as the central hub, supported by specialized sub-entities: the Government Delegation against Gender Violence, which coordinates policies and measures against violence; the Directorate General for Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination and against Racism, which addresses discrimination on multiple grounds; and the Directorate-General for Real and Effective Equality for LGBTQI+ people, to ensure rights and non-discrimination.

Italy coordinates through the Department for Equal Opportunities, which connects 20 ministries and local governments through technical bodies such as the National Observatory and the Inter-institutional Steering Committee, while the Ministry of the Family, Natality, and Equal Opportunities establishes overarching strategies.

France relies on the Ministry for Gender Equality to develop national policies, coordinate inter-ministerial programs, and oversee implementation in areas such as women's rights,

employment, education, and political representation, with more limited direct enforcement in the private sector.

Independent Equality Bodies and Oversight Mechanisms

Among the six countries, several countries emphasise independent or semi-independent bodies for complaint-handling and monitoring. Austria's Ombudsman for Equal Treatment offers free, confidential advice on discrimination, including gender, ethnicity, religion, age, and sexual orientation, while the Equal Treatment Commission examines cases through three senates and issues non-binding expert opinions with remedial recommendations. France's Défenseur des Droits serves as an independent authority that investigates discrimination and harassment complaints, provides legal guidance, mediates disputes, and refers cases to courts. Greece features the Greek Ombudsman as the national equality body, investigating complaints across public and private sectors, alongside the Research Center for Gender Equality, which supports evidence-based policy through research and studies. Italy concentrates on the National Equality Council, which fights labor-market discrimination, and the unique Guarantee Committees within public administrations, which promote well-being and resolve harassment and mobbing. In Spain, there are national and municipal-level anti-discrimination offices, such as those in Valencia, as well as the Women's Institute under the Ministry of Equality, which provides social and labor integration programs for vulnerable women. Sweden employs an independent body with a broad mandate to advance and protect the respect and protection of human rights, as opposed to depending on traditional government oversight.

Inclusion strategies, support networks, and violence prevention

Austria stands out with a network of 35 Violence Protection Centres, at least one in each state, that offer legally required, publicly funded assistance. Police automatically notify the centres when barring orders are issued, and the centres get in touch with victims within 24 hours to provide safety planning, legal counsel, and psychosocial support.

To ensure a multisectoral strategy against violence, Spain's Government Delegation against Gender Violence coordinates administrative activities in parallel with specialist organizations, such as the Directorates-General for Anti-Racism and LGBTQI+ Equality. The nationwide Center for Knowledge on Males' Violence Against Women in Sweden is a government-commissioned organization that oversees nationwide hotlines and specialist clinics for victims who are transgender, men, or women. Greece runs counseling services for women who have experienced violence. France combats violence by coordinating ministries and enforcing anti-harassment laws and maternity and parental leave entitlements through the Labor Inspectorate.

For border inclusion, Sweden benefits from municipalities and regions as key promoters of equality, in addition to the National Office for Dialogue with civil society, established in 2018. Greece employs Regional and Municipal Equality Committees and a National Council involving

ministries, NGOs, and academies. Austria supports migrant and refugee integration via the Austrian Integration Fund, offering language courses, values orientation, counselling, and labour programs; and the public Employment Service's dedicated Women's program, like career guidance, re-entry after parental leave, and vocational training. Spain targets vulnerable groups through the Women's Institute's programs. Italy uses territorial Councillors and the inter-institutional Steering Committee for Multi-level coordination. France draws advisory input from the High Council for Gender Equality.

Comparative view

Sweden places a great focus on integrated governmental organizations with long-term plans and robust mainstreaming. There are specialized ministries in France and Spain with sub-specializations like violence and LGBTQI+. In Austria, Italy, and Greece, independent oversight, municipal and regional involvement, and ministry-level action are all combined. While some rely on decentralization or processes enforced by complaints, Sweden, France, and Spain often have more centralized, resourced bodies with board mandates.

Women's Rights and Protection Mechanisms

Employment Rights

In accordance with EU directives, all six nations outlawed gender-based discrimination in employment, including hiring, promotion, training, working conditions, and compensation.

In Austria, the Equal Treatment Act applies in any case to all employees who have a private-law employment contract, whereas the Federal Equal Treatment Act applies to all civil servants and employees of public authorities and state-affiliated companies.

The Sweden Discrimination Act (2008,567), supported by allied legislation such as the Work Environment Act for Equal Safety, combats discrimination and promotes equal chances regardless of gender, transgender identity, ethnicity, religion, handicap, sexual orientation, or age.

Greece promises equal treatment in hiring, working conditions, promotions, and training, in addition to equal compensation for equal or equivalent work using gender-neutral criteria and protection from sexual harassment and gender discrimination.

Spain promotes real and effective equality through the Law for Effective Equality (2007,3), ensuring equal opportunities in access, training, promotion, and conditions, with protections against sexual and gender-based harassment.

Italy provides the right to equal pay for equal value work and bans gender discrimination in access, training, and promotions.

France prohibits discrimination in pay, promotion, training, classification, or conditions for equal work/value, plus safeguards against sexist behavior and harassment.

Overall, strong anti-discrimination laws and employer obligations to prevent harassment. The EU pay gap remains around 11-13% unadjusted, with higher gaps in some countries, like in Austria, often reported as higher, but transparency measures, for example, the upcoming EU pay Transparency Directive, aim to narrow it further.

Parental Leave and Work-Life Balance

Policies encourage shared caregiving, support women's labor participation, and reduce career interruptions. All exceed EU minimums (14 weeks maternity, 2 mandatory postnatal).

Austria offers 8 weeks of pre-maternity and post-maternity leave, extended for complications, with an allowance at the average of 80% of net income plus dismissal protection (only for the first year) during pregnancy and four months after birth. Parental leave extends to the child's second birthday, with incentives like an optional "dad month" after birth and bonuses for equal sharing under the childcare benefit system.

The Swedish model is distinguished by its very flexible approach. In addition to the 480-day leave, parents are legally entitled to reduce their working hours by 25% until a child turns eight to ensure professional life adapts to school transitions. The system also provides ten days specifically for the non-birthing parent after delivery for early bonding. Most notably, Sweden recognizes that good work-life balance frequently necessitates support outside of the nuclear family by allowing the transfer of up to 45 leave days to grandparents or close guardians.

Greece prohibits pregnancy/maternity discrimination, including dismissal, grants maternity and parental leave, and allows flexible arrangements for parents with childcare responsibilities to promote shared family duties.

Spain has a strong focus on work-life balance and shared obligations. This is demonstrated by equalized leave, which was extended to 17 weeks per parent with full pay in 2025, paternal rights, and reconciliation measures.

Italy has 10 days of mandatory paternity leave with 100% pay, five months of maternity leave with 80% pay, and paid parental leave to the age of twelve with 30–80% pay (depending on the length of the leave). Prohibition of dismissal of a woman from the beginning of her pregnancy until the child reaches the age of one year but in practice More than 70% of validated dismissals in Italy are of mothers in the first year of the child's life, with the main reason being the structural impossibility of reconciling work and care.

France offers 16 weeks of fully paid maternity leave, which can be extended for a third child or twins, as well as 25 days of paid paternity leave, up to three years of parental leave (shareable, partially compensated), and a new birth leave of up to two months per parent beginning in 2026. Pregnancy, leave, and post-partum care are all covered under dismissal protection.

Sweden excels at generosity and sharing rewards, whereas recent reforms in Spain and France have improved equality. Challenges include paternal participation and re-entry assistance.

Protection Against Gender- Based Violence

Mechanisms focus on immediate response, victim support, and prevention. Austria's Protection Against Violence Act, in cases of domestic violence, requires the perpetrator (not the victim) to leave the house. When the police issue a restraining order, they notify the relevant domestic violence centre. These centers offer free and confidential assistance to victims, including safety planning, legal advice, and psychosocial support. A 24/7 multilingual Women's Helpline and 29 women's shelters (coordinated nationally) provide further aid. Sweden's response to gender-based violence is a whole-society approach, with strong legislative mandates, specific institutional support and attention to the structural sources of inequality. The national strategy and NCK include structural preventions, specialized clinical and legal care and its inclusive protection lines. Spain coordinates via the Government Delegation against Gender Violence. Italy supports through observatories and legal frameworks. France enforces via ministry oversight, labor inspection, and harassment protections. Austria's proactive, decentralized policy stands out for its speed and accessibility, which all comply with the EU Directive on Violence Against Women.

Complaints and Redress Mechanisms

Redress systems enable victims to report issues, seek remedies, and encourage accountability. Mechanisms range from centralized independent bodies to localized or sector-specific services, with a focus on open access, confidentiality, and multi-stakeholder participation. Sweden, France, and Spain frequently have proactive, well-integrated systems that encourage reporting, whilst others emphasize accessible emergency or workplace-focused choices.

- Sweden: the Swedish Institute for Human Rights (National Human Rights Institute) defends, promotes, and monitors human rights, including gender equality. It assesses the human rights situations, proposes government measures, engages in international cooperation, promotes education and awareness, and submits an annual report with recommendations. The National Center for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women (NCK) serves as the focal point of Sweden's unified national campaign to combat violence. This government-commissioned organization offers helplines specifically for men and transgender people, as well as 24-hour anonymous support that includes multilingual translators for everyone. The framework also incorporates targeted assistance through the (Right to Choose) line, which supports victims of coercive control and honor-based violence regardless of age or gender, and specialized therapeutic care in an outpatient clinic. The Equality Ombudsman handles specific discrimination complaints, including gender, offering free advice, investigation, mediation, and court representation. These bodies contribute to preventive and systemic change, supporting Sweden's top-ranked equality performance.
- France: France uses a multi-dimensional system in which victims can file formal complaints, "plainte" or statements (main courante) with police or gendarmerie, or in a hospital with trained support to low barriers. Online platforms ease access for those

facing fear, stigma, or mobility issues. The national hotline offers free, confidential 24/7 listening, information, protection orders (issued by judges to remove perpetrators/prohibit contact), emergency alert for high-risk cases, and legal aid for low-income victims, ensuring protections. National awareness campaigns, for example, on drug-facilitated violence boost prevention and reporting. The *Défenseur des droits* oversees board discrimination complaints. This comprehensive setup supports high equality outcomes.

- Spain: At the state level, the Ministry of Equality and the Women's Institute promote equality and support active policies for women's employment, self-employment, and cross-cutting gender mainstreaming. Complaints related to workplace discrimination, including harassment and unequal opportunities, can be addressed through labor rights enforcement, with protections against sexual and gender-based harassment. Trade unions and associations provide accessible entry points. This multi-layered approach supports board redress, aligning with Spain's strong progress in the index.
- Italy: For gender-based violence and stalking, a free 24/7 national service directs victims to anti-violence centers and shelters. Free legal assistance is guaranteed for victims of gender-based crimes, often without strict income limits. These targeted mechanisms focus on workplace coercion and immediate violence support, integrated with board equality coordination.

A mandatory procedure at the National Inspectorate of Labor requires validation of resignations for parents until the child becomes three years old to ensure they are voluntary and not coerced due to discrimination.

- Austria: While the focus here includes integration and employment support, the Ombudsman for Equal Treatment and Equal Treatment Commission handle discrimination complaints (including gender), offering free advice and non-binding opinions/recommendations. The Austrian Integration Fund aids migrants/refugees (including women) with counseling and labor integration, and the Public Employment Service runs a dedicated women's program for career orientation, re-entry after parental leave, and vocational training. These mechanisms link equality redress to broader inclusion, complementing strong violence protections.
- Greece: The Greek Ombudsman investigates complaints on equal treatment and discrimination, with free, accessible online submission via its website. It provides information, registers complaints, and guides individuals on labor rights violations, harassment, or discrimination. Police and judicial authorities handle emergency reports and proactive prosecution. Additional support comes from SOS helplines, networks, counseling centers, and local authorities for comprehensive help. This combination offers accessible redress, particularly for vulnerable groups, though broader awareness gaps persist.

Comparative Insights

France stands out with highly accessible, multichannel reporting (online, hospital, and hotline) and immediate safety tools, contributing to strong victim-centered redress. In Sweden, there is

a strong emphasis on independent oversight, with specialized organizations and a dedicated human rights authority. These organizations combine systemic oversight and direct victim assistance. Spain integrates ministry-level promotion with union/association defense for workplace issues. Greece and Italy offer practical, localized/emergency options (helplines, mandatory validations). Austria connects equality to integration/employment support.

Direct strengths include France's emergency devices and Sweden's preventive reporting culture. Indirectly, countries with lower scores benefit from community/NGO ties. The ongoing transposition of the 2024 EU Directives (by mid-2026) will further harmonize independence, powers, and resources, enhancing cross-country alignment.

Social Inclusion Measures and policies for Vulnerable women

Approaches handle various discriminations, each of which can affect itself and have a direct or indirect negative impact on the discrimination factors.

The EU Equality Strategy 2026-2030 adopts a strong intersectional approach, prioritizing compound inequalities for migrant women, women with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, rural women, Roma women, and others, while embedding gender mainstreaming across policies to combat poverty, violence, and exclusion. These policies reflect national priorities, integration for migrants, empowerment through employment, and targeted protection against multiple forms of discrimination.

Migrant women

Often, migrant women encounter barriers in language, qualifications recognition, employment, and violence risks.

Austria centers integration on language, labor market entry, and values orientation via the Austrian Integration Fund and the Federal Chancellery's Department for Integration, which funds women's empowerment projects in migrant communities, for example, 148 projects in 2024 with a total budget of €22.41 million. Programs like the UN-award-winning "*Competence Check for Women 2016-2020*," continued in 2026 helped refugee women identify skills, set career goals, prevent overqualification, and access placements through career platforms and provincial counseling.

France mainstreams gender in integration through the Republican Integration Contract (requiring civic and language training to B1 level by 2026, with modules on gender equality, women's rights, and violence prevention; priority for unemployed and low-skilled migrant women). The Global and Individualized Accompaniment for Refugees, which is expanded post 2023, supports up to 30,000 annually, which makes a total of 40% of migrant women, focusing on employment, housing, training, and qualification recognition. The Action Plan for Employment of Foreign Women tackles childcare, stereotypes, and non-recognition through mentorship and rapid registration.

Spain addresses migrant women through the Ministry of Equality's Directorate-General for Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination against Racism, promoting cross-cutting equal treatment and elimination of discrimination based on origin and nationality.

Sweden's mainstreaming efforts target a greater financial and social independence, for example through integrated programs such as SFI-Combo, where migrant women can learn Swedish while at the same time receiving vocational training. This is supported by a compulsory Civic Orientation course (100+ hours) with knowledge of Swedish legislation, individual rights and gender equality in the participant's mother tongue. Digital literacy is prioritized in two ways: Initiatives like the ReDI School, which provides free tech training for refugee women, and "Parental SFI" which ensures that mothers can continue their language and legal education without having to stop for childcare, ensure a continuous pathway toward integration and safety.

Greece uses the National Integration Strategy 2022 for language, skills, and labor counseling for refugees, in addition to local equality committees.

Italy facilitates integration through accommodation systems, hosting 14,684 women in 2024, 26.7% of the total number of migrant women. As well as pathways for women exiting violence, marginalization through employability guarantees and incentives for disadvantaged hires.

Women with Disabilities

Policies address two types of discrimination: accessibility and vulnerability, as well as violence and poverty. Italy emphasizes increased exposure to sexual violence and poverty, implementing innovative tactics for accessible emergency services, sign language, video calls, and augmentative communication. Greece protects disadvantaged groups, including disabled women, and ensures equitable access to healthcare and education. Austria collaborates on employment re-entry and integration programs. Sweden encourages equitable living through disability-inclusive equality laws. France provides job flexibility and intersectional health safeguards. Spain eliminates barriers through equitable policies.

LGBTQI+ Individuals

All EU member countries focus on preventing discrimination to protect rights. Sweden has developed transgender rights (legal gender transition since 1972; from the age of 16 with permission since July 2025), with continued progress despite lobbying cries for action. Spain has a separate Directorate-General for Real and Effective Equality for LGBTQI+ People, which ensures non-discrimination and respect for emotional and sexual freedom. Italy's National LGBTQI+ Strategy 2022-2025 combats hate crimes and educates healthcare and justice staff about prejudice. Greece includes LGBTQI+ women under its vulnerable group policies. France and Austria have governmental and private equality bodies that safeguard LGBTQI+ people.

Rural Women

Rural women confront isolation and limited possibilities for a variety of reasons, including physical distance, travel time, a scarcity of educational facilities, and access to the healthcare

system. Spain encourages equality in rural development and agriculture, whereas other countries handle it indirectly through national employment, education, and care access, with varying rural focus.

Support services (Services offer counseling, legal aid, and referrals)

European countries have implemented a variety of targeted measures to combat gender-based violence and assist affected women. Greece provides psychosocial support via women's organisations, UNHCR programs for Gender Based Violences (GBV) risks in migrant/refugee women, and local equality committees. France, Sweden, and Austria feature multilingual helplines and specialized organisations. Italy guarantees free legal aid for gender-based crimes. The Spanish Ministry of Equality provides immediate protection through the WRAP Program, a geolocation tool to find refuges and support services.

Training and Education (Skills, re-entry, and empowerment)

The Empower Her project is a transnational Erasmus+ initiative that aims to advance gender equality, civic participation, and youth empowerment across Europe. Austria's public Employment Service offers vocational training and career orientation for women post-parental leave. France provides vocational training and qualification recognition in refugee accompaniment and provides services via the AGIR Program for refugee integration and the AMAL project for migrant women. Greece includes skills development in integration courses. Sweden ensures equal education access and anti-discrimination in schools. The state in Spain works on prevention through specialized training in the Institute for Women and the Virtual School of Equality, and the Master Plan for Coexistence and Improved Safety work with educational institutions to address systemic racism, discrimination and gender-based violence.

Psychological and Social support (mental health and empowerment)

Greece offers psychosocial aid through networks and community initiatives. France integrates into violence/GBV responses. Austria provides counseling via integration centres.

Shelter and housing (safe spaces for violence victims and migrants): The Roma Strategy for Roma Women, which focuses on low-skilled women, offers them free housing, counseling, and legal assistance through Italy's vulnerable women reception mechanisms. Austria and France offer both emergency and long-term housing. The national organization of Sweden, ROKS, offers shelters for women and young women.

Childcare Services (work-life balance and employment)

Sweden's affordable childcare and gender-neutral leave encourage shared responsibilities, and France prioritizes childcare in migrant women's employment plans.

Comparative Analysis of Social Inclusion Approaches and support services

Sweden and France displayed integrated, high-resource mainstreaming with strong results, propelling them to the top of the EU Index Scores, with an emphasis on board empowerment and prevention. Austria excels in targeted migrant/refugee programs like competence assessments and provincial help. Spain has established a dedicated directorate for racism, LGBTQI+, and vulnerable populations. Despite lower overall rankings, Greece and Italy prioritize local and non-governmental organization partnerships and a multidimensional framework, such as national initiatives, incentives for disadvantaged women, and effective addressing of intersectional vulnerabilities.

Direct strengths include Austria's skill-based migrant integration, France's priority language and employment modules, and Sweden's pioneering transgender/LGBTQI+ rights. Indirectly, community-based programs in Greece and Italy provide lessons in grassroots empowerment.

Key Indicators and Data

Gender Equality Index

These scores encompass labor, money, knowledge, time, power, and health areas. Sweden and France dominate due to great performance in power, money, and work, while Greece falls behind in work and power.

The Gender Equality Index³ includes other topics such as violence against women. The 2024 edition of the Composite Index on violence against women is calculated using data from the EU-GBV survey on gender violence. Due to data limitations, the composite measure of violence could not be calculated for France (due to the high number of unreports) and Italy (barriers to reporting for migrant/vulnerable groups), but data are available at the indicator level; in France, 35% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, while in Italy, 32% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15.

Women Employment Rate

The women employment rate is calculated as the percentage of women aged 20 to 64 who are employed. According to Eurostat⁴, the EU average for 2024 was 70.8%.

Higher rates in Sweden and France reflect greater work-life balance regulations, but lower rates in Italy and Greece are attributed to care burdens and structural constraints.

- Sweden: Approximately 79.9% (one of the largest in the EU, resulting in a 4% gender employment gap).
- France: Approximately 72.2% (gender disparity 5.9%).
- Austria: Approximately 73.9% (gender gap 6.9%).
- Spain: 66.5% (gender gap, 9.8%, larger gender disparity).
- Greece: Between 59.9% (among the lowest, gender gap 18.8%).
- Italy: 57.4% (among the lowest in the EU, with a gender gap of 19.4%).

Gender Pay Gap

The unadjusted gender pay gap refers to the difference in average hourly earnings between men and women (Eurostat 2024 data). The EU's average was 11.1%.

Austria is notable for its continually wide disparities, which are frequently linked to occupational segregation and part-time work for women. Lower disparities in Italy reflect selection effects (women working in low-wage jobs). While the unadjusted hourly difference is 5.6%, it is expected to be greater than 20% in the private sector, providing a clearer picture of wage disparities. However, they may not represent complete equity.⁵

- Sweden: 11.2% (moderate, comparable to the EU average).
- France: Approximately 11.8% (moderate).
- Spain: around 7.3% (below or near average).
- Italy: 5.3% (one of the smallest unadjusted discrepancies).
- Austria: 18.3% (one of the highest in the EU).
- Greece: around 13.4% (roughly average).

Labor Market Participation Rates

The labor force participation rate represents the proportion of the working-age population (20-64 or comparable) that is either employed or actively looking for work. According to recent EU-level data (Eurostat/OECD 2024-2025), women account for 70.8% of the EU average; figures vary by nation⁶.

- Sweden: a high female involvement rate of 79.9%, which is comparable to that of men.
- France: Approximately 72.2%.
- Spain: Approximately 66.5%.
- Italy: lower (57.4%), with significant gender inequalities.
- Austria: Approximately 73.9%.

- Greece: Around 69.9%, among the lowest rates.

Sweden consistently has the smallest gender gaps in participation due to generous parental leave and childcare policies.

Comparative Analysis of Key Indicators

Sweden and France routinely rank first in indicators, with high female employment, modest wage discrepancies, robust engagement, high index scores, and effective (albeit over-reported) violent responses. This represents integrated strategies for leave, childcare, and mainstreaming.

Spain fares well on the Index of Progress and Pay Gap, although it suffers from employment issues. Italy and Greece have lower employment rates and higher gender inequalities, which are frequently linked to care burdens, geographical disparities, and implementation challenges. Austria succeeds in certain areas, yet it has a significant salary difference.

All countries are making progress, but ultimate equality is still a long way off.

Main Challenges

Despite strong legal frameworks in all countries, persistent structural, cultural, and resource-related obstacles hinder the full realization of equality, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Economic barriers:

Economic inequalities remain a core challenge, driven by pay gaps, occupational segregation, part-time working, and care burdens that disproportionately affect women.

Austria has one of the widest unadjusted gender pay gaps in the EU at 18.3% in 2023, with an adjusted gap of 6.3% even in similar roles. Half of working-age women work part-time due to care responsibilities, reducing lifetime earnings and pensions. In France, immigrant women earn much less; immigrants earn 28% less at entry, with persisting inequalities throughout generations and more precarious/part-time jobs. Sweden continues to experience income gaps, lower pay in female-dominated sectors, a high proportion of women working part-time, and delayed progress toward economic equality. Italy has a "child penalty" with women leaving the workforce after childbirth, poor individual income (women are 11 points more likely to earn less than €9 per hour), and higher individual poverty rates for working women. Spain emphasizes job uncertainty, overrepresentation in low-wage feminized sectors such as domestic and care labor, and barriers to steady income and housing. Greece has low full-time equivalent employment for women, a high rate of precarious and part-time work, and occupational segregation, all of which contribute to poverty in the workplace.

Gender stereotypes and norms

Gender stereotypes persist in all six countries, Spain, Italy, Greece, France, Austria, and Sweden, though their severity varies from one to another. According to the European Institute

for Gender Equality, traditional gender roles continue to have an impact on society, notably in areas such as employment, family, and decision-making.

In countries such as Greece and Italy, these stereotypes are more pronounced, with women frequently expected to shoulder primary responsibility for childcare and home responsibilities, while males are perceived as the primary breadwinners and authority figures. Gender roles are increasingly changing in Spain and Austria, although women are still more likely to work in caregiving, while men work in leadership or technology. Despite a high level of gender equality in France, subtle preconceptions exist, particularly in terms of career development and income discrepancies, where men are frequently regarded as being more ambitious. Furthermore, norms in France portray migrant women as docile dependents, limiting recognition of qualifications and aspirations. LGBTQI+ women endure lesbophobic attitudes, with many hiding their orientation at work (45% LGBTQI+ respondents).

Sweden is the EU's top performer on equality but there is still a gap, with women doing more unpaid care work than men. Most importantly, women are now more educated than men, although men still have a slight advantage at the top levels of private sector leadership.

Overall, despite improvements in Europe, gender stereotypes continue to impact social expectations and possibilities for both men and women.

Access to Care, Health Services, Education, and Employment

Access restrictions vary according to geography, migration status, and vulnerability.

In health services, France emphasizes rural women's "gender rural penalty" isolation, delayed diagnosis, increased GBV vulnerability, and limited abortion and gynecological facilities. Austria reports a shortage of childcare places: in 2024, only 30.2% of children under the age of three attended a formal childcare facility, compared with 39.3% at the EU level; however, literacy and language hurdles remain widespread among migrant women. Sweden reveals lower mental health among young women, more stress-related sick leave, and disparities in health outcomes. Italy suffers abortion access barriers, with 64.4% opposing gynecologists, territorial splits, North-South expenditure disparities, and high NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rates for young southern women (30-36%). Greece has limited access for migrant/refugee women due to language barriers and status uncertainties, as well as unequal implementation outside of major cities. Spain addresses issues related to feminine illnesses (fibromyalgia, mental health, and obstetric violence) and rural/precarious access.

Intersectional Vulnerabilities

Compounded prejudice disproportionately affects migrants, the disabled, LGBTQI+, rural, and ethnic minority women. In Austria, migrant women labor in low-wage industries and are overqualified. 24% of women with disabilities are at great danger of poverty, while LGBTQI+ people, particularly transgender people, experience 9% unemployment and occupational

discrimination. Immigrant women in France labor in low-wage areas, where they face deskilling and prejudice. Rural migrants and disabled women confront additional difficulties. In Italy, migrant women labor in polarized low-skilled professions, with around 50% in the four sectors, substantial trafficking risks, absolute poverty, and 41.5% LGBTQI+ women concealing their orientation and facing abuse. Women with disabilities in Spain endure pay disparities and also face forced sterilization, which is the direct result of paternalism, systemic invisibility, and a disregard for their autonomy. The birth control programs have also targeted the Roma community, while migrant/refugee/Roma/disabled/LGBTQI+ women in Greece are vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation, underreporting, and restrictive asylum rules.

Implementation Gaps

Robust legislation typically lacks consistent enforcement, resources, and monitoring. Despite legislation, progress in Sweden has stalled or been suboptimal, with societal reform occurring gradually. In Italy, a gap between improved laws and actual realities (family welfare, court data shortages) remains. In Greece, there is unequal local competence, underreporting, and a lack of municipal cohesion. Despite planning, discrepancies between rural and immigrant communities persist in France. Services in Austria and Spain vary depending on resource availability or area.

Comparative Analysis of Challenges

Sweden and France have made significant but uneven progress (economic stagnation and stereotypes persist despite high scores). Austria and Italy have significant wage differences and structural care duties. Spain and Greece struggle with implementation and intersectionality, especially among migrants and rural women. Direct hurdles include economics (part-time work in Austria, Italy, and Greece) and stereotypes (familistic Italy and traditional Greece). Indirect: rural isolation (France); trafficking/borders (Italy, Greece, and Spain).

Intersectional Transparency

Pay Transparency: At the EU level, Austria, France, and Sweden advocate for enforcement and serve as EU directive implementers, while Italy, Spain, and Greece underperform in practice despite rules.

Focus on Gender-Based Violence:

Focus on Gender-Based Violence: The national mainstream policies of all six countries, including Austrian centers, Swedish NCK/helplines, France's 3919/TGD, Italy's Red Code, Spain's Pact renewal, and Greek helplines, prioritize gender-based violence. However, underreporting of violence and access disparities exist.

Integration of Migrant Women: Austria and France are at the forefront of focused programs such as competency testing, language acquisition, and employment. Greece and Italy confront trafficking and precarity. Sweden reports lower employment rates among foreign-born residents. Spain's statistics show a wage gap of 2% between native women (23%) and migrant women (25%).

Comparative Analysis of Advocacy Positions

France is committed to putting a stop to everyday sexism, ensuring equitable leave, and providing GBV shelters. Sweden is attempting to enhance reserved parental leave, combat prejudices, encourage entrepreneurship, and implement integration programs. Italy emphasizes self-determination income, feminization of welfare, and CAV autonomy. Spain emphasizes on the Borden violence pact, which challenges patriarchal traditions. Greece emphasizes effective equality, consistent funding, and victim-centered remedies. Furthermore, Austria addresses income and power disparities, as well as migrant overqualification.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of gender equality frameworks across Italy, Spain, Austria, Greece, France, and Sweden highlights both a strong convergence of normative commitments and significant divergences in legal design, policy implementation, and institutional capacity. All six countries operate within a shared European framework that promotes equality as a fundamental right and policy priority. This common foundation is reflected in the widespread adoption of anti-discrimination laws, national strategies, and targeted measures addressing key issues such as workplace inequality, gender-based violence, and women's representation.

However, beyond this convergence, the analysis reveals distinct national pathways in translating these principles into effective governance systems. Italy's incremental and adaptive approach allows for flexibility and responsiveness but may lead to fragmentation. Spain's highly structured and comprehensive model ensures coherence and depth, though it requires strong institutional coordination. Austria prioritises clarity and enforcement, relying on well-defined legal instruments and institutional mechanisms to ensure implementation.

Greece's framework illustrates the impact of European integration, with legal developments closely aligned with EU directives, yet facing challenges in operationalisation. France combines a strong constitutional tradition with increasingly interventionist policies, using regulatory tools to address persistent inequalities. Sweden stands out for its systemic and preventive model, where gender equality is deeply embedded within the welfare state and integrated across all policy domains.

Across these diverse systems, several common priorities emerge. Workplace equality remains central, addressed through a range of tools from regulatory obligations (France, Italy) to structural welfare policies (Sweden). Gender-based violence is universally recognised as a critical issue, with varying degrees of policy integration from comprehensive frameworks in Spain to prevention-oriented approaches in Sweden. The consideration of intersectional vulnerabilities is expanding, though unevenly implemented, while the promotion of women's

leadership reflects different balances between legal mandates and cultural or institutional dynamics.

These variations underscore a key finding: the effectiveness of gender equality policies depends not only on the existence of legal frameworks but also on their coherence, implementation mechanisms, and integration into broader governance systems. Countries that combine strong legal foundations with coordinated strategies and institutional capacity, such as Spain and Sweden, tend to achieve more systemic outcomes. In contrast, where frameworks are more fragmented or implementation capacity is limited, challenges persist despite formal commitments.

Ultimately, the six-country comparison demonstrates that there is no single model for achieving gender equality. Instead, different configurations of legal innovation, policy design, and institutional organisation can lead to progress, provided they are internally coherent and effectively implemented. For European-level cooperation, this diversity represents both a challenge and an opportunity: a challenge in ensuring consistency across contexts, and an opportunity to foster mutual learning by identifying transferable practices, such as Spain's integrated legislative frameworks, Sweden's preventive welfare-based approach, or France's regulatory enforcement mechanisms.

A key implication for future policy development is the need to strengthen the link between legal norms and practical outcomes. This requires not only continued legislative efforts but also investment in institutional capacity, monitoring systems, and cross-sectoral coordination. In this perspective, advancing gender equality in Europe depends less on the proliferation of new norms than on the consolidation, integration, and effective implementation of existing frameworks.

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