UnlockEquality:

Level up your workplace

Work Package 2 / Activity 1 (WP2/A1)

Collection of Bad Practices / Common Mistakes on Gender Inequality in the Workplace

Overall Synthesis Report
Partner Eurodimensions

December 2025

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Contents

INTRODUCTION....5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY....6
1. Persistent Gender Pay Inequality....6
2. Discrimination Linked to Pregnancy, Motherhood and Reproductive Rights....6
3. Barriers to Promotion, Leadership and Recognition....6
4. Harassment, Abuse of Power and Unsafe Workplace Cultures....6
5. Gender Stereotyping, Bias and Unequal Task Allocation....7
6. LGBTQ+ and Trans Inclusion Gaps....7
Conclusion....7
1.MALTA Overview....8
2. Key Themes Emerging from the Cases....8
2.1 Pregnancy and Maternity Discrimination (Cases 1 and 4)....8
2.2 Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Power in the Public Sector (Case 2)....9
2.3 Structural Inequality in Women's Elite Sport (Case 3)....9
2.4 Trans Inclusion and Policy Ambiguity (Case 5)....10
3. Implications for the Situation in Malta....10
4.Conclusion....11
NETHERLANDS....13
1. Overview....13
2. Key Themes Emerging from the Cases....13
2.1 Persistent Gender Pay Gap in Practice (Case 1)....13
2.2 Gendered Promotion Barriers in a Dutch Tech Company (Case 2)....14
2.3 Sexual Harassment and Unsafe Workplace Cultures (Case 3)....14
2.4 Widespread Pregnancy and Motherhood Discrimination (Case 4)....15
2.5 Discrimination against Trans, Intersex and Non-Binary Employees (Case 5)....16
3. Implications for the Situation in the Netherlands....16
4. Conclusion....17
LATVIA....18

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1. Overview....18
2. Key Themes Emerging from the Case....18
2.1 Undervaluing Female Expertise in a Large Enterprise (Case 1)....18
2.2 Maternal Stereotyping After Return from Maternity Leave (Case 2)....19
2.3 Pregnancy-Related Recall from Foreign Posting in the MFA (Case 3)....20
2.4 Emotional Abuse and Alleged Gender-Based Discrimination in a Public Meeting (Case 4)....20
2.5 Male Worker Excluded from Front-of-House Duties in a Café (Case 5)....21
4. Conclusion....23
CROATIA....24
1. Overview....24
2. Key Themes Emerging from the Cases....24
2.1 Pregnancy and IVF Discrimination – Jurčić v. Croatia (Case 1)....24
2.2 Sexual Harassment in Healthcare – KBC Osijek (Case 2)....25
2.3 Structural Barriers for Women in Police and Security Services (Case 3)....26
2.4 Gender Pay Gap and Women's Underrepresentation in the Private Sector. 26
(Case 4)....26
2.5 Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Power at the University of Zagreb (Case 5) 27
3. Implications for the Situation in Croatia....28
4. Conclusion....28
Denmark....30
1. Overview....30
2. Key Themes Emerging from the Cases....30
2.1 Unequal Pay for Equal Work in the Public Sector (Case 1)....30
2.2 Pregnancy Discrimination via Sudden Policy Change (Case 2)....31
2.3 Structural Pay Gap in Public Healthcare (Case 3)....32
2.4 The Glass Ceiling in Danish Corporate Leadership (Case 4)....32
2.5 Transgender Employees Facing Misgendering and Exclusion (Case 5)....33
3. Implications for the Situation in Denmark....33
4..Conclusion....34
SUMMARY OF THE REPORT....35
Conclusion....37
GUIDELINE: KEY AREAS FOR THE PARTNERSHIP TO FOCUS ON WHEN DEVELOPING THE PRACTICAL CHECKLIST....37

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1. ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES & STRUCTURAL SAFEGUARDS.....37
2. EVERYDAY BEHAVIOURS & INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS.....37
3. HR PRACTICES: PAY, RECRUITMENT, TASK ALLOCATION, PROMOTION.....38
4. PREGNANCY, MATERNITY & PARENTHOOD.....38
5. INCLUSION OF LGBTQ+ & GENDER-DIVERSE EMPLOYEES.....38
GUIDANCE FOR THE PARTNERSHIP.....39
Annex – Sources of Information.....40

INTRODUCTION

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This report presents a cross-country synthesis of bad practices and common mistakes related to gender inequality in the workplace, collected under Work Package 2 / Activity 1 (WP2/A1)

The analysis draws on five documented cases from each partner country Malta, the Netherlands, Latvia, Croatia and Denmark resulting in a total of twenty-five real-world examples of discriminatory practices, harmful behaviours and systemic gaps within organisations.
The purpose of this consolidated report is to identify and compare the patterns that emerge across different sectors and national settings. These cases span a wide range of contexts, including public administration, healthcare, hospitality, tech, sport, academia and private enterprise. Despite institutional and cultural differences between countries, the findings reveal a shared challenge: gender inequality continues to persist in forms that are often overlooked, normalised, or difficult for employees to report.

The report highlights various dimensions of inequality, such as discriminatory HR practices, unequal pay, harassment and abuse of power, pregnancy and motherhood discrimination, exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals and culturally embedded stereotypes that shape workplace interactions and opportunities. By examining these cases together, the project aims to illuminate not only overt violations but also subtle, everyday behaviours and structural weaknesses that undermine fairness and equal treatment.
The insights gathered in this synthesis lay the foundation for the next stage of the project: developing a practical and user-friendly checklist to help employees, managers, educators and youth workers recognise behaviours, policies and systems that contribute to gender inequality in their environments. This report therefore serves as both an analytical tool and a roadmap for building capacity, raising awareness and promoting inclusive organisational cultures across the partner countries.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This synthesis report analyses 25 documented workplace bad practices from Malta, the Netherlands, Latvia, Croatia and Denmark. These cases offer a comprehensive overview of how gender inequality manifests across sectors, cultures and

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organisational structures. Despite differences between countries, six clear cross-cutting trends emerge. Together, they show that gender inequality remains systemic, often hidden in routine practices and sustained through weak structures, cultural norms and insufficient accountability.

1. Persistent Gender Pay Inequality

All countries reported examples of pay inequality:

- Women paid less than men in identical roles (Malta, Netherlands, Denmark)
- Structural undervaluation of women-dominated professions, especially in healthcare and social services (Denmark, Croatia)
- Lack of transparency in salary systems and salary-step placements

This demonstrates that formal equality laws do not automatically guarantee equal pay in practice.

2. Discrimination Linked to Pregnancy, Motherhood and Reproductive Rights

Across countries, pregnancy remains a major trigger for discrimination:

- Contract non-renewals after announcing pregnancy (Malta, Netherlands)
- Sudden policy changes disadvantaging pregnant workers (Denmark)
- Maternity stereotyping and unfair redistribution of tasks (Latvia)
- Penalties for IVF treatment or reproductive choices (Croatia)
- Career disruption, including foreign-posting recall due to pregnancy (Latvia)

These cases show a widespread "motherhood penalty," often justified with organisational pretexts.

3. Barriers to Promotion, Leadership and Recognition

Women continue to be excluded from leadership or denied recognition:

- Vertical segregation in STEM and tech industries (Netherlands, Latvia)
- Glass ceilings in police, security and corporate leadership (Croatia, Denmark)
- Informal networks, subjective selection criteria and lack of transparency
- Women's professional expertise repeatedly questioned or overshadowed

Leadership inequality often replicates itself through biased systems and cultures.

4. Harassment, Abuse of Power and Unsafe Workplace Cultures

Cases of sexual harassment, intimidation and abusive behaviour appeared in every country:

- Severe harassment in hospitals and universities (Malta, Croatia, Denmark)
- Aggressive or humiliating conduct by senior figures tolerated in public settings (Latvia)
- Fear of reporting, slow investigations and weak institutional responses

These examples reveal significant gaps in complaint mechanisms, accountability and cultural norms around power.

5. Gender Stereotyping, Bias and Unequal Task Allocation

The cases show that stereotypes directly shape daily workplace practices:

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- Women sidelined or assigned supportive tasks
- Men given more visibility, authority and high-responsibility roles
- "Customer preference" used as an excuse for discriminatory role allocation (Latvia)
- Mothers presumed less committed; women's competence questioned

These everyday behaviours often go unchallenged and accumulate into systemic inequality.

6. LGBTQ+ and Trans Inclusion Gaps

Across countries, trans and non-binary employees encounter:

- Misgendering and disrespect
- Denial of access to gender-appropriate facilities (Malta, Denmark, Netherlands)
- Lack of transition-support procedures
- HR systems that do not accommodate diverse identities

This highlights a strong need for explicit, practical and inclusive policies.

Conclusion

Taken together, these cases demonstrate that gender inequality in Europe today is rarely the result of a single policy failure. Rather, it arises from a combination of:

- non-transparent HR systems,
- unclear or poorly implemented policies,
- power imbalances,
- cultural stereotypes,
- weak reporting mechanisms, and
- limited awareness or training.
-

The findings underscore the necessity for proactive, preventive strategies—not just legal compliance. They directly inform the development of the UnlockEquality Practical Checklist, which will equip employees, managers, educators and youth workers with the tools to identify and address gender inequality in their everyday professional environments.

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1.MALTA Overview

The five cases span different sectors and situations:
Hospitality sector – alleged dismissal during pregnancy (Case 1)
Public health sector – sexual harassment and abuse of power (Case 2)
Elite sport – unequal conditions for women national football players (Case 3)
Private sector – pressure to resign after pregnancy disclosure (Case 4)
Gaming / entertainment sector – contested case on trans inclusion and access to facilities (Case 5)

Taken together, they highlight:

- Persistent risks of pregnancy and maternity discrimination
- Serious sexual harassment and abuse of power in hierarchical environments
- Structural underinvestment and inequality in women's sport
- Policy ambiguity and social discomfort around trans inclusion
- Systemic weaknesses: slow redress mechanisms, fear of reporting and gaps in workplace policies and training

2. Key Themes Emerging from the Cases

2.1 Pregnancy and Maternity Discrimination (Cases 1 and 4)

Case 1 concerns a legal counsel in a major hospitality group who alleged that her engagement was terminated while six months pregnant. The employer argued that a fixed-term contract had simply expired. The case took several years to move through the Industrial Tribunal and courts, ultimately resulting in a judgment that did not confirm discrimination. Nonetheless, it exposed:

- The vulnerability of pregnant employees whose contracts are "allowed to lapse" shortly after disclosure of pregnancy
- The risk that contractual technicalities can obscure potentially discriminatory motives
- The damaging effect of lengthy, complex procedures, which can discourage other women from seeking justice

Case 4, documented by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), describes an employee in the private sector who reported unfair treatment after announcing her pregnancy and alleged that she was pressed to resign. The case is presented by NCPE as a clear example of pregnancy-related discrimination.
Across both cases, the Indicators of gender inequality- include:

- Direct discrimination linked to pregnancy (pressure to resign, adverse treatment)

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- Use of performance or organisational pretexts to justify adverse action
- Insufficient managerial awareness of legal protections
- Lack of robust maternity and pregnancy policies in workplaces

The Possible Consequences- are severe: loss of income and job stability for women, increased stress and uncertainty, reputational and legal risk for employers and a chilling effect on other pregnant employees who might otherwise report misconduct.

2.2 Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Power in the Public Sector (Case 2)

Case 2 relates to Malta's main public hospital. A former chief nursing manager was convicted and imprisoned in 2025 for years of sexual harassment and abuse of a subordinate nurse, following nearly eight years of proceedings.
Key features of this bad practice:

- Repeated sexual harassment and molestation carried out by a senior figure
- A strong power imbalance between manager and subordinate
- A protracted investigation and judicial process, which signals systemic difficulties in tackling such cases swiftly
- A work environment in which fear of retaliation and lack of trust in reporting systems may have allowed abuse to continue

The case highlights important structural weaknesses:

- Hierarchical cultures can enable impunity for senior staff
- Internal reporting mechanisms might lack independence, confidentiality, or speed
- There may be insufficient trauma-informed protocols and support for victims
- Bystanders may not be empowered or trained to intervene

The impact extends beyond the direct victim (who suffered serious psychological harm):

- Erosion of trust in management and institutional safeguards
- Damage to organisational reputation and the wider public sector
- A deterrent effect on other potential complainants

2.3 Structural Inequality in Women's Elite Sport (Case 3)

Case 3 concerns long-standing unequal conditions for Malta's women national football team players compared with their male counterparts. These disparities prompted negotiations that led to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to improve working conditions, employment status and protections for women players. The MoU is framed as a first step rather than full equality, which implies that bad practices existed historically and may not be entirely resolved.
Main elements of the bad practice:

- Inferior contractual status for women compared to men
- Gaps in remuneration, benefits and support structures

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- Lack of formalised protections, with many arrangements previously ad hoc

Possible Underlying causes - include:

- Historic underinvestment in women's sport
- Stereotypes and assumptions about the "market value" of women's football
- Absence of binding standards or equality-based policies for national teams
- Possible Consequences- are both individual and systemic:
- Limited earning potential and career development for women players
- Difficulty in attracting and retaining talent
- A weaker pipeline of girls and young women progressing in sport
- Reputational risk for sporting authorities and the country's international image

2.4 Trans Inclusion and Policy Ambiguity (Case 5)

Case 5 deals with a 21-year-old trans woman employed as a game presenter. According to media reporting, she was asked not to use the women's changing room after colleagues raised concerns. She described feeling excluded, singled out and denied recognition of her gender identity. The employer, in contrast, stated that facility assignment was based on the gender recorded on official documents and emphasised that it was following internal procedures. No tribunal or court decision has been issued to confirm or reject claims of discrimination, so the case remains contested.

This example reveals:

- Policy ambiguity regarding access to gender-segregated facilities for trans employees
- Lack of clear, written, trans-inclusive policies, especially around transition stages
- Reliance on ad hoc or document-based decisions instead of inclusive, rights-based guidance
- The emotional toll on the employee, who reported sadness, anger and reduced sense of belonging at work

The wider impact includes:

- Increased public and social media scrutiny of company practice
- Tension and uncertainty among staff
- A missed opportunity for structured dialogue and internal mediation

This case shows that gender equality in Malta's workplaces must also address gender identity and expression, not only binary male–female issues.

3. Implications for the Situation in Malta

Across all five cases, several recurring patterns emerge:

- Slow and complex redress mechanisms
- Lengthy tribunal and court proceedings (Cases 1 and 2) weaken confidence in justice systems and may deter victims from coming forward.
- Power Imbalances and Fear of Retaliation

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- Senior managers or employers hold significant power over employees' contracts, careers and working conditions, which can discourage reporting in cases of harassment, discrimination, or unfair treatment (Cases 1, 2, 4, 5).
- Policy Gaps and Inconsistent Implementation
- Insufficient or unclear policies on pregnancy protection, maternity rights, equal pay in sport and trans inclusion.
- Even where legislation exists, workplace-level implementation appears weak or uneven.

Cultural Attitudes and Stereotypes

- Persistent stereotypes about pregnant workers' reliability or availability.
- Assumptions about women's sport being "less valuable" than men's.
- Social discomfort and lack of understanding around trans identities.
- Lack of Training and Awareness
- Managers and HR staff are not always adequately trained in equality law, respectful communication and early conflict resolution.
- Colleagues may not be aware of bystander roles or how to support victims.

Based on the cases collected, the situation in Malta can be characterised by:

- Formal commitments to equality, but gaps in practice within organisations.
- Vulnerability for pregnant workers, women in male-dominated hierarchies, women athletes and trans employees.
- A need for more proactive, preventive strategies rather than reactive handling of complaints once harm has already occurred.

The fact that several cases have reached the media and national equality bodies shows growing awareness and willingness to speak out. At the same time, the need for external intervention suggests that many organisations do not yet manage to resolve issues effectively in-house.

4.Conclusion

The bad practices identified in Malta show that gender inequality in the workplace remains is concrete, lived reality across sectors: hospitality, public health, sport, private enterprise and gaming. Women may face discrimination when pregnant, harassment in hierarchical environments and unequal pay and conditions in professional sport. Trans employees may encounter exclusion and policy ambiguity around something as basic as access to changing facilities.

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At the same time, these cases also point to paths for change: stronger policies, better training, improved reporting systems and reforms driven by unions, equality bodies and civil society. For UnlockEquality, Malta's experience offers valuable insights into where workplace interventions should focus – not only on written rules, but on changing culture, strengthening accountability and ensuring that every worker can participate in the workplace with dignity and safety, regardless of gender or gender identity.

NETHERLANDS

1. Overview

The five Dutch cases cover a wide range of sectors, organisational types and forms of discrimination:

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- Public administration – unequal pay for a woman municipal worker (Case 1)
- Private tech sector– gendered promotion barriers and leadership imbalance (Case 2)
- Companies across all sectors – sexual harassment, bullying, racism and unsafe culture (Case 3)
- Multiple sectors – widespread pregnancy and motherhood discrimination (Case 4)
- Cross-sectoral workplaces – exclusion and discrimination of trans, intersex and non-binary people (Case 5)
- Taken together, they highlight:
- A persistent gender pay gap, even in public bodies
- Structural barriers to promotion and leadership for women in STEM
- High levels of sexual harassment and transgressive behaviour, often inadequately addressed
- Ongoing pregnancy and motherhood discrimination in recruitment, contracts and career progression
- Significant LGBTQ+ inclusion gaps, particularly affecting trans and non-binary employees
- They also point to systemic weaknesses: non-transparent HR practices, weak policy implementation, lack of accountability and fear of reporting.

2. Key Themes Emerging from the Cases

2.1 Persistent Gender Pay Gap in Practice (Case 1)

Case 1 focuses on a municipal employee, Liselotte, who discovered that a male colleague with the same age, experience and education was paid two salary steps higher. When she raised this with management, they admitted that there was no substantive reason for the difference and claimed that her colleague had "negotiated better". Her complaint was dismissed and the pay gap remained,

Indicators of gender inequality-:

- Unequal pay for equal work, despite identical profile
- Reliance on individual negotiation rather than transparent, gender-neutral salary criteria
- Management's refusal to correct an acknowledged unfair difference

These outline the following concerns:

- Reduced income, slower long-term earnings growth and financial insecurity for Liselotte
- Feelings of betrayal, demotivation and loss of trust in organisational fairness

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- Risk of wider dissatisfaction, turnover and reputational harm for the organisation
- Possible Underlying causes - include non-transparent pay systems, normalisation of negotiation-based disparities and lack of structured HR oversight.

2.2 Gendered Promotion Barriers in a Dutch Tech Company (Case 2)

Case 2 is based on a study in a Dutch tech company (cloud software, STEM). Women represent 27 percent of staff but only 9 percent of group leaders, revealing strong vertical segregation. Promotion processes are informal and depend heavily on visibility, networks and subjective managerial assessments.
Key elements of the bad practice:

- Opaque promotion criteria and reliance on informal channels
- Unconscious bias in how leadership potential is recognised
- Lower access for women to influential networks, key projects and consistent feedback

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Under-representation of women in leadership and decision-making
- Slower career progression and reduced chances to demonstrate leadership skills
- A self-reinforcing cycle where male-dominated leadership reproduces itself
- Impacts:
- Frustration, disengagement and higher turnover risk among women
- Reduced diversity of perspectives in teams and leadership
- Weaker employer brand and possible negative impact on innovation and performance

2.3 Sexual Harassment and Unsafe Workplace Cultures (Case 3)

Case 3 draws on a national survey of more than 2 000 HR managers across Dutch companies. It shows increased reports of sexual harassment, bullying, racism and other forms of transgressive behaviour, alongside a rising demand for confidential counsellors. However, many organisations admit that they do not always take such reports seriously or actively work to create a safe culture.

Indicators of gender inequality-:

- Unwanted sexual comments, boundary-crossing behaviour and harassment, especially affecting women and junior staff

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- Inadequate internal procedures, unclear responsibilities and inconsistent follow-up
- Fear of retaliation and low trust in reporting channels
- Impacts:
- Emotional harm: stress, anxiety, reduced confidence and feeling unsafe at work
- Lower job satisfaction, higher absenteeism and exits from the organisation
- Damaged team cohesion and trust, silence around problems and a toxic climate
- Reputational, legal and financial risks for employers
- Underlying factors include weak policies, limited training, hierarchical cultures and tolerance of inappropriate behaviour.

2.4 Widespread Pregnancy and Motherhood Discrimination (Case 4)

Case 4 is based on findings from the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights regarding high levels of pregnancy and motherhood discrimination across Dutch workplaces. This includes sectors such as retail, hospitality, education, health care and office work and affects both small and large organisations.
Typical forms of discrimination

- Non-renewal of contracts after pregnancy disclosure
- Reductions in working hours or exclusion from important tasks
- Being passed over for promotion or rejected in recruitment after mentioning pregnancy or family plans
- Assumptions that pregnant employees and mothers are less committed or less capable

Possible Consequences-:

- Career stagnation, lost income and long-term financial disadvantage
- High stress during an already vulnerable life phase, reduced confidence and feelings of injustice
- Disrupted teamwork and reinforced stigma around caregiving responsibilities
- Legal risk, turnover and reputational damage for employers

The case points to a gap between legal protection and actual practice in workplaces.

2.5 Discrimination against Trans, Intersex and Non-Binary Employees (Case 5)

Case 5 is based on the Inclusion4All report by Transgender Netwerk Nederland, which documents workplace realities for trans, intersex and non-binary employees

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across sectors. Many Dutch workplaces still lack clear LGBTQ+ inclusion policies and concrete procedures for supporting gender-diverse staff.

Indicators of gender inequality-:

- Biased treatment during recruitment and hiring
- Persistent misgendering by colleagues or managers
- Lack of safe or appropriate facilities (such as toilets and changing rooms)
- Limited or non-existent organisational support during transition
- Exclusion from informal networks and social activities

Possible Consequences-:

- Stress, anxiety and reduced psychological safety
- Lower job satisfaction and withdrawal from team interaction
- Barriers to career progression or decisions to leave the organisation
- Loss of diverse talent, weakened innovation and damage to organisational reputation
- Possible Underlying causes - include low awareness of gender diversity, absence of clear policies and discomfort or fear of "doing it wrong", which leads to avoidance instead of inclusion.

3. Implications for the Situation in the Netherlands

Across all five Dutch cases, several recurring systemic patterns are visible:

- Non-transparent HR practices
- Opaque salary setting and promotion criteria (Cases 1 and 2)
- Informal networks and subjective assessments strongly influence careers.
- Weak policy implementation and accountability

Even where legal protections exist, internal policies are absent, unclear, or not enforced (Cases 1, 3, 4, 5).
Managers often lack guidance and are not held accountable for discriminatory outcomes.

Cultural norms and stereotypes

- Stereotypes about men as "natural leaders" and women as less suited for leadership or technical roles (Case 2).
- Motherhood penalty assumptions that mothers are less committed (Case 4).
- Normative views of gender and discomfort with trans and non-binary identities (Case 5).
- Power imbalances and fear of reporting
- Employees in vulnerable positions (junior staff, pregnant workers, LGBTQ+ employees) fear retaliation or being ignored (Cases 1, 3, 4, 5).
- Gaps between formal equality and lived experience
- National laws and public discourse emphasise equality, yet persistent pay gaps, harassment and discrimination show that practice still lags behind.

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Based on these cases, the situation in the Netherlands can be characterised as follows:

- The country has strong legal and policy frameworks on equality, but implementation at workplace level remains uneven.
- Women face structural disadvantages through pay gaps, barriers to promotion and pregnancy discrimination.
- Sexual harassment and other transgressive behaviours remain widespread, with many organisations struggling to respond effectively.
- Trans, intersex and non-binary employees encounter significant barriers to full participation and recognition.

The growing visibility of these issues in research, media and national reports indicates increased awareness and willingness to speak out, but also reveals how far many organisations still need to go to create safe, fair and inclusive workplaces.

4. Conclusion

The Dutch bad-practice cases show that gender inequality and discrimination in the Netherlands are not isolated incidents but systemic patterns that cut across sectors and identities. Women may be underpaid, blocked from leadership, harassed, or penalised for pregnancy and motherhood. Trans, intersex and non-binary employees often face misgendering, exclusion and lack of institutional support.

At the same time, the cases provide clear guidance on where change is possible: transparent pay and promotion systems, strong policies, active leadership and inclusive cultures that protect everyone's dignity and safety. For UnlockEquality, the Dutch experience underlines that progress requires both structural reform and cultural change, so that every person – regardless of gender or gender identity – can participate in the workplace on equal terms.

LATVIA

1. Overview

The five cases from Latvia span different sectors and forms of discrimination:

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- Large manufacturing/logistics enterprise – systematic under-recognition of a senior female expert (Case 1)
- IT and services – maternal stereotyping after return from maternity leave (Case 2)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs – pregnancy-related recall from a foreign posting (Case 3)
- Public administration – emotionally aggressive behaviour and alleged gender-based discrimination in a high-level meeting (Case 4)
- Hospitality – male worker excluded from front-of-house duties based on presumed customer preferences and perceived sexual orientation (Case 5)

Taken together, these cases highlight:

- Persistent gender stereotyping in STEM and leadership roles
- A strong motherhood penalty and pregnancy-related discrimination
- Unclear or insufficient internal regulations on equality in public service postings
- Abusive or intimidating communication styles in hierarchical public settings
- Gendered and sexuality-related occupational segregation, sometimes justified by "customer preference"
- They also reveal systemic weaknesses in Latvia such as: limited monitoring of equality outcomes, gaps in ethics and behaviour codes, weak HR accountability and fear of retaliation or futility when raising complaints.

2. Key Themes Emerging from the Case

2.1 Undervaluing Female Expertise in a Large Enterprise (Case 1)

Case 1 describes a senior female engineer responsible for quality control in a major Latvian manufacturing and logistics company. Although she formally headed the department and was the designated expert, her professional input was frequently questioned or ignored. In internal and external meetings, complex technical questions were routinely directed to male colleagues and her proposals were sometimes disregarded until a man confirmed the same point. Management did not intervene or explicitly support her role.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Gender-based competence bias – assumptions that men are more credible in technical and engineering contexts.
- Invisible leadership – the woman's formal authority was not mirrored in interaction patterns.
- Microaggressions and exclusion from decision-making, as her expertise had to be validated by male colleagues.

Possible Consequences-

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- Professional frustration, reduced confidence and slower career progression for the female engineer.
- Risk of losing highly skilled female staff and weakening diversity in decision-making.
- A signal to other women in the company that technical leadership is not genuinely recognised when held by women.

Possible Underlying causes -

- Lack of management training on unconscious bias and inclusive communication.
- No mechanisms to monitor who speaks, who is addressed and whose proposals are adopted in key meetings.

2.2 Maternal Stereotyping After Return from Maternity Leave (Case 2)

Case 2 involves a mid-level project manager in a Latvian IT and services company who returned from maternity leave with strong performance history and updated professional certifications. Despite this, managers assumed she would be frequently absent due to childcare and began to consider her "less reliable" for demanding projects. High-visibility assignments were reassigned, meeting invitations decreased and client questions were redirected to others. Flexible-working requests were interpreted as a sign of reduced commitment.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Classic "maternal wall" bias – the assumption that mothers are less ambitious, less available and less promotion-worthy.
- Indirect discrimination via project allocation, reduced visibility and biased performance expectations.
- Opportunities for training and leadership quietly offered to male peers instead.

Possible Consequences-

- Stalled career progression and a motherhood penalty in terms of earnings and status.
- Increased stress and disappointment in a vulnerable life phase.
- A chilling effect on other women considering motherhood or return to work and risk of talent loss for the company.
- Possible Underlying causes -
- Traditional gender norms about caregiving and work commitment.
- No structured return-to-work plans or policies for parents.
- Weak HR monitoring of promotion, ratings and assignments by gender and parental status.

2.3 Pregnancy-Related Recall from Foreign Posting in the MFA (Case 3)

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Case 3 relates to Latvia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to media reports, diplomat Kristīne Rimša informed the ministry in September 2023 that she was pregnant and requested to spend the pregnancy, post-partum period and initial parental leave in Brussels, continuing afterwards in the same EU assignment. The ministry reportedly insisted that "no exceptions" would be made, recalled her to Latvia and filled her post with another employee. She sued for discrimination. In June 2025, the first-instance court annulled the recall order and required the ministry to offer an equivalent position, while the ministry signalled its intention to appeal.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Potential pregnancy-related discrimination in foreign posting and recall practices.
- Lack of clear internal rules on how pregnancy and parental leave are managed in diplomatic rotations.
- Structural risk that women in foreign service bear disproportionate career disruption due to pregnancy.

Possible Consequences-

- Disruption of career trajectory and loss of valuable foreign posting experience.
- Impact on family arrangements and continuity of medical care abroad.
- Systemic message that pregnancy may be incompatible with prestigious postings, potentially discouraging women from diplomatic careers.
- Possible Underlying causes -
- Absence of pregnancy-inclusive internal regulations governing recalls.
- Insufficient data and monitoring of how pregnancy affects postings and promotions.
- Need for stronger alignment between ministry practice, equality law and the recommendations of the Latvian Ombudsman (Tiesībsargs).

2.4 Emotional Abuse and Alleged Gender-Based Discrimination in a Public Meeting (Case 4)

Case 4 is based on an Ombudsman's opinion concerning an inter-institutional meeting organised by a Latvian government body. A female participant alleged gender-based discrimination and emotional abuse by a senior male official who shouted, hit the table and used degrading language. Twelve other participants were interviewed anonymously. Most described the situation as "emotional" rather than abusive and ultimately no legal proof of discrimination was established. However, the incident highlighted problematic behaviour and power dynamics in a public-sector setting.

Indicators of gender inequality-

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- The complainant believed that a male colleague would not have been treated in the same way, pointing to gendered double standards around authority and disagreement.
- An environment where aggressive communication by senior men is tolerated or minimised.
- Lack of clear behavioural standards for high-level officials.

Possible Consequences-

- Humiliation and loss of professional dignity for the complainant.
- Erosion of trust in the institution's commitment to equality and respectful dialogue.
- Reputational risks for public administration and the perception that there are no effective Possible Consequences- for abusive behaviour by senior figures.

Possible Underlying causes -

- Lack of a comprehensive ethics code with enforceable behavioural rules.
- No systematic recording (audio or written protocols) of such meetings, reducing transparency.
- Tolerance of "emotional" outbursts in hierarchical contexts and low sensitivity to gendered perceptions of authority.

2.5 Male Worker Excluded from Front-of-House Duties in a Café (Case 5)

Case 5 covers a small café in Riga's Old Town. A male recent graduate was assigned to wash dishes, while newer staff worked front-of-house. When he asked to serve tables, the manager refused, claiming that guests "would not be happy" if he served them. The case was highlighted by the Human Rights Centre as an example of discrimination where employers use alleged customer preferences to justify biased treatment.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Occupational segregation based on gender and perceived sexual orientation.
- The worker was kept in back-of-house work despite seniority, while others received visible, customer-facing roles.
- Use of "customer preference" as a cover for discriminatory decisions, which is explicitly incompatible with equality principles.

Possible Consequences-

- Blocked access to tips and valuable customer-service experience.
- Stagnation and damage to professional dignity.
- Organisational risks of legal liability, reputational harm and normalisation of exclusionary practices.

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Possible Underlying causes -

- Lack of awareness among managers about anti-discrimination law and the illegitimacy of customer-preference arguments.
- No monitoring of task allocation and career progression by gender or other protected grounds.
- Weak or unknown complaint mechanisms for employees.

3. Implications for the Situation in Latvia

Across all five Latvian cases, several recurring patterns stand out:

- Persistent gender stereotypes and bias
- Women in technical and leadership roles are perceived as less authoritative (Case 1).
- Mothers are assumed to be unreliable or less committed (Case 2).
- Pregnancy is treated as a problem for foreign posting continuity (Case 3).
- Male and possibly non-heterosexual workers are sidelined in customer-facing roles (Case 5).
- Weak policy frameworks and implementation
- Lack of clear internal rules on pregnancy and foreign postings (Case 3).
- Absence of behavioural and ethics codes for senior officials (Case 4).
- No structured return-to-work or equality monitoring mechanisms in the private sector (Cases 1, 2, 5).
- Power imbalances and hierarchical cultures
- Senior officials and managers act with limited accountability (Cases 1, 3, 4, 5).
- Employees fear negative Possible Consequences- or assume complaints will not bring change.
- Insufficient HR monitoring and data
- No regular tracking of promotions, assignments, pay, or complaints by gender and parental status (Cases 1, 2, 3, 5).
- Limited visibility of how decisions cumulatively disadvantage women or other groups.
- Gaps between formal equality and lived experience
- Equality is formally recognised in law and policy, but actual practice in organisations often reproduces stereotypes, exclusion and unequal treatment.

Based on these cases, the situation in Latvia can be described as follows:

- Gender inequality is embedded in everyday practices, not only in extreme or overt discrimination.
- Women in senior technical, managerial and diplomatic roles face subtle and overt barriers that limit recognition, progression and stability.
- Motherhood and pregnancy still trigger career penalties and organisational resistance.

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- Some public-sector settings tolerate emotionally aggressive behaviour by senior men, undermining dignity and trust.
- Men and gender-nonconforming employees can also face discrimination when they do not fit traditional customer or employer expectations, revealing that rigid gender norms harm multiple groups.
- The visibility of these issues through interviews, media cases and Ombudsman opinions shows growing awareness and scrutiny. It also underlines that national-level commitments must be matched with concrete organisational reforms if workplaces in Latvia are to become genuinely equal and inclusive.

4. Conclusion

The Latvian bad-practice cases show that gender inequality in the workplace manifests not only in spectacular legal disputes but in day-to-day patterns of bias, exclusion and disrespect. Women's expertise can be undervalued, mothers can be sidelined, pregnant diplomats can face disruptive recalls and women in public meetings can experience aggressive treatment that undermines their dignity. At the same time, rigid gender norms also affect men and possibly LGBTQ+ employees, as illustrated by the café case where a male worker was barred from front-of-house duties.

For UnlockEquality, these cases from Latvia underline that real progress requires more than compliance. It demands cultural change, accountable leadership, transparent HR systems and safe reporting channels so that every person, regardless of gender or parental status, can participate fully and safely in the workplace.

CROATIA

1. Overview

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The five Croatian cases cover a broad range of sectors and forms of discrimination:

- Public administration / health insurance – dismissal and discrimination linked to IVF and pregnancy (Case 1)
- Healthcare – sexual harassment and institutional failure to protect staff (Case 2)
- Police and security services – structural barriers to women's participation and promotion (Case 3)
- Private sector – persistent gender pay gap and underrepresentation of women in leadership (Case 4)
- Higher education – sexual harassment and abuse of power at the University of Zagreb (Case 5)

Taken together, they highlight:

- Pregnancy and reproductive discrimination (including IVF-related bias)
- Serious sexual harassment and abuse of power in healthcare and universities
- Structural underrepresentation and glass ceilings in the police and private sector
- A persistent gender pay gap and lack of transparent HR systems
- Institutional inaction and weak complaint mechanisms, especially in hierarchical settings

2. Key Themes Emerging from the Cases

2.1 Pregnancy and IVF Discrimination – Jurčić v. Croatia (Case 1)

Case 1 concerns the European Court of Human Rights case *Jurčić v. Croatia*. A woman undergoing in vitro fertilisation (IVF) was denied health insurance and effectively lost her employment because the authorities assumed she had intentionally become pregnant while unemployed in order to obtain benefits. The Court found that Croatia had violated Article 14 (non-discrimination) and Article 8 (private life).

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Direct discrimination based on pregnancy and reproductive choices.
- Suspicion and moral judgment around women's fertility treatment and timing of pregnancy.
- Institutional failure to understand and apply equality and human-rights standards in social and employment protection systems.

Possible Consequences-

- Loss of income and social security coverage.
- Psychological distress and a strong message that women who assert reproductive rights risk punishment.

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- Undermining trust in public institutions that should protect, rather than penalise, pregnant women and those undergoing fertility treatment.

Possible Underlying causes -

- Deep-rooted stereotypes about "proper" female behaviour and motherhood.
- Lack of HR and administrative safeguards against pregnancy discrimination.
- Insufficient training of decision-makers in equality and human-rights law.

2.2 Sexual Harassment in Healthcare – KBC Osijek (Case 2)

Case 2 concerns the Clinical Hospital Centre Osijek (KBC Osijek). In 2024, the Croatian Gender Equality Ombudsperson initiated proceedings against the hospital for failing to implement effective mechanisms to protect staff from sexual harassment and discrimination.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Sexual harassment and gender-based hostility in a highly hierarchical institution.
- Absence of clear procedures, delayed reactions and tolerance of inappropriate conduct by staff.
- Power imbalances between senior staff and subordinates that discourage reporting.

Possible Consequences-

- Psychological harm to victims and long-term impact on their sense of safety at work.
- Loss of trust in internal complaint mechanisms and in management's willingness to act.
- Reputational damage to the public health system and potential difficulties in retaining staff

Possible Underlying causes -

- Weak HR structures and lack of independent investigation mechanisms.
- Organisational culture that normalises or minimises harassment.
- Insufficient training on harassment prevention and gender equality.

2.3 Structural Barriers for Women in Police and Security Services (Case 3)

Case 3 is based on the 2022 report of the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality on women in the police and Ministry of the Interior system. Women make up less than

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20% of police employees and their share in operational and leadership positions is significantly lower, despite formal equality.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Structural underrepresentation of women, especially in operational and senior posts.
- Informal barriers and cultural expectations that policing and security are "male professions".
- Candidate selection and promotion processes relying on subjective criteria such as "readiness for fieldwork" or "physical ability", which can be used to justify excluding women

Possible Consequences-

- Limited professional advancement and lack of career pathways for women.
- A deficit of female role models and leaders within the police.
- Reinforcement of stereotypes that may reduce women's trust in law-enforcement institutions and discourage them from applying or staying in the service.

Possible Underlying causes -

- Persistent cultural stereotypes about "male occupations".
- Absence of gender-sensitive employment and promotion policies.
- Lack of mentoring, networking and support programmes for women in security services.

2.4 Gender Pay Gap and Women's Underrepresentation in the Private Sector (Case 4)

Case 4 draws on analyses of pay differences in Croatia. Women earn on average around 11% less than men and they remain underrepresented in senior management positions, despite legal frameworks promoting equality.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- A persistent gender pay gap in the private sector.
- Fewer women in decision-making roles and company leadership.
- Lack of transparent salary policies and opaque promotion practices that tend to favour men.

Possible Consequences-

- Reduced lifetime earnings and pensions for women, contributing to broader economic inequality.
- Lower motivation and potentially higher turnover among talented women.
- Missed opportunities for companies to benefit from diverse leadership and perspectives

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Possible Underlying causes -

- Cultural stereotypes about leadership as a "male" domain.
- Weak enforcement of equality laws in everyday HR practice.
- Absence of systematic gender pay audits and transparent pay structures.

2.5 Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Power at the University of Zagreb (Case 5)

Case 5 concerns multiple reports of sexual harassment at the University of Zagreb between 2021 and 2022. Several female students and teaching assistants publicly reported harassment by male professors, including unwanted physical contact, inappropriate comments and abuse of authority in exchange for academic privileges. The Ombudsperson for Gender Equality concluded that the University failed to ensure adequate protection and transparency.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Sexual harassment rooted in gendered power relations within rigid academic hierarchies.
- Slow, opaque internal procedures that discourage victims from pursuing complaints.
- Lack of independent reporting mechanisms and inconsistent or delayed disciplinary action.

Possible Consequences-

- Severe psychological harm and loss of confidence for victims.
- Withdrawal of women from certain academic paths or institutions, limiting their career opportunities.
- Damage to the University's national and international reputation and a chilling effect on future reporting.

Possible Underlying causes -

- Strong hierarchies and dependence of students on professors for grades, references and career opportunities.
- Insufficient gender-sensitivity and harassment-prevention training.
- Absence of independent complaint bodies and robust whistleblower protection.

3. Implications for the Situation in Croatia

Across all five Croatian cases, several recurring patterns emerge:

- Persistent stereotypes and gendered norms

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- Suspicion and control over women's reproductive choices (Case 1).
- Assumptions about "male professions" in policing and leadership (Case 3, Case 4).
- Gendered power relations in healthcare and academia (Cases 2 and 5).
- Weak institutional safeguards and HR structures
- Inadequate policies and mechanisms to prevent and address harassment (Cases 2 and 5).
- Non-transparent pay and promotion systems (Case 4).
- Limited pregnancy protection protocols and training in public systems (Case 1).
- Hierarchical cultures and power imbalances
- Strong dependency relationships in hospitals, universities and police forces.
- Fear of retaliation, career damage, or futility of complaints discouraging victims from coming forward.
- Gaps between legal frameworks and practice
- Croatia has formal equality and anti-discrimination laws, but implementation is uneven and often reactive.
- Ombudsperson interventions and ECHR judgments indicate that institutions frequently fail to apply rights-based approaches until pressured externally.

Based on these cases, the situation in Croatia can be characterised as follows:

Gender inequality is systemic, not limited to isolated incidents and appears in both public and private sectors.
Pregnant women and those undergoing fertility treatment face particular vulnerability in employment and social protection systems.
Sexual harassment and abuse of power remain serious problems in healthcare and higher education, with insufficient institutional response.
Women encounter glass ceilings and pay gaps, especially in private companies and security services.
Existing equality laws require stronger, more consistent implementation at the organisational level.

4. Conclusion

The Croatian bad-practice cases show that gender inequality cuts across reproductive rights, workplace safety, pay, promotion and academic integrity. Pregnant workers and women undergoing IVF can be penalised; women in police and private companies face structural barriers and pay gaps; and students and staff in healthcare and universities may encounter sexual harassment in environments where power imbalances are strong and complaint mechanisms weak.

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For UnlockEquality, Croatia's experience underlines the need for robust institutional safeguards, transparent HR systems and cultural change. Only by combining stronger policies, effective accountability and everyday practices that respect dignity and equality can workplaces and institutions in Croatia become genuinely safe and inclusive for everyone, regardless of gender or reproductive status.

Denmark

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1. Overview

The five Danish cases span multiple sectors and types of discrimination:

- Public sector agency – woman underpaid compared to male colleagues in identical roles (Case 1)
- Medium-sized private company – pregnancy discrimination through a sudden change in maternity benefits (Case 2)
- Public healthcare – structural pay inequality affecting nurses and other women-dominated professions (Case 3)
- Large private companies – severe underrepresentation of women in top corporate leadership (Case 4)
- Cross-sector – discrimination and exclusion of transgender employees, including misgendering and facility access (Case 5)

Taken together, they highlight:

- A persistent gender pay gap, both at individual and structural levels
- Pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination, including indirect forms via policy changes
- Systemic undervaluation of women-dominated professions, especially in healthcare
- A pronounced glass ceiling in corporate Denmark
- Serious gaps in LGBTQ+ and trans inclusion in workplaces

They also reveal systemic weaknesses: opaque HR practices, limited pay transparency, lack of gender-impact assessment for policies and weak implementation of inclusion measures.

2. Key Themes Emerging from the Cases

2.1 Unequal Pay for Equal Work in the Public Sector (Case 1)

Case 1 concerns a woman employed in a Danish publicly funded agency who discovered that male colleagues hired into the same role, performing the same tasks, had been placed on higher salary steps within the same pay grade. Internal salary bands and seniority rules existed on paper, but managers had wide discretion to place individuals at different steps.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Unjustified pay gap between a woman and male colleagues doing equal work.
- Over-reliance on "individual assessments" and discretion, with no transparent justification.
- Lack of internal checks to detect gendered patterns in salary step placement.
- Possible Consequences-

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- Financial loss and long-term earnings disadvantage for the woman.
- Emotional distress, reduced trust in the employer and demotivation.
- Wider concern among staff about fairness and possible systemic bias.

The trade union FOA intervened and concluded that Denmark's Equal Treatment Act had been breached. Management initially resisted but eventually agreed to retroactive pay adjustment, underlining that external pressure was needed to correct the inequality.

2.2 Pregnancy Discrimination via Sudden Policy Change (Case 2)

Case 2 describes a medium-sized company where a woman had a contractual right to full salary during maternity leave. Shortly after she disclosed her pregnancy in late 2016, the employer amended its maternity policy, removing full pay and pension contributions and replacing them with only statutory minimum benefits. She was the first employee affected by this change.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Indirect pregnancy discrimination: a formally general policy change, timed and applied in a way that disproportionately harmed a pregnant worker.
- Material deterioration of employment conditions directly linked to pregnancy disclosure.

Possible Consequences-

- Significant income loss during maternity leave, along with uncertainty and stress.
- A chilling message to other employees that announcing pregnancy might lead to worse conditions.
- For the company, a Supreme Court ruling in 2024 confirming violation of the Equal Treatment Act and ordering compensation.

Possible Underlying causes -

- Absence of equality impact assessment before HR policy changes.
- Failure to recognise that "neutral" changes can have disparate impact on protected groups.
- Lack of internal safeguards to protect pregnant employees from detrimental changes in terms.

2.3 Structural Pay Gap in Public Healthcare (Case 3)

Case 3 focuses on long-standing pay inequalities in Denmark's public wage-setting system, particularly affecting nurses and other women-dominated professions. The roots lie in the 1969 Civil Servant Reform, which set wage levels that systematically placed female-dominated occupations lower than male-dominated ones with comparable educational demands.

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Indicators of gender inequality-

- Structural undervaluation of care professions dominated by women (for example nursing).
- Lower pay for jobs with similar complexity and responsibility compared with male-dominated professions such as police or technical roles.
- Persistence of outdated wage rankings, despite changes in the nature and demands of the work.

Possible Consequences-

- Chronic dissatisfaction and protests among nurses, including major actions in 2021.
- Recruitment and retention challenges in public healthcare.
- Reinforcement of societal norms that women's work is "worth less", with knock-on effects for pensions and lifetime income.

The case demonstrates how historical frameworks, left unreformed, can continue to generate gender inequality across generations even without explicit discriminatory intent.

2.4 The Glass Ceiling in Danish Corporate Leadership (Case 4)

Case 4 draws on analyses of Denmark's 100 largest companies (Børsen Top 100). Women constitute roughly one third of the general workforce in these firms, but only about 5 percent of CEOs are women and more than half of companies have all-male executive boards. Denmark currently has no binding gender quotas for corporate boards; efforts rely mainly on voluntary measures.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Sharp drop-off in women's representation from middle management to executive and CEO level.
- Leadership pipelines shaped by informal networks, sponsorship and closed-door succession planning.
- "Meritocratic" narratives masking unconscious bias and status-quo preferences.

Possible Consequences-

- Limited access for women to decision-making power and influence.
- Lost leadership potential and reduced diversity of perspectives at the top.
- Risk to reputation and employer branding for companies perceived as non-inclusive.

Possible Underlying causes -

- Male-dominated networks and informal selection processes.
- Lack of transparent promotion criteria and measurable gender targets.
- Weak accountability mechanisms for board and executive diversity.

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2.5 Transgender Employees Facing Misgendering and Exclusion (Case 5)

Case 5 is based on national survey findings from Denmark's Board of Equal Treatment and the Institute for Human Rights on the workplace experiences of transgender people. A large share of trans employees reported discrimination, harassment and exclusion across sectors.

Indicators of gender inequality-

- Persistent misgendering (wrong pronouns or names) by colleagues and managers, even after employees clearly communicate their identities.
- HR and IT systems that cannot easily update names or gender markers unless legal changes are completed.
- Restrictive or ad hoc decisions about access to restrooms and gender-segregated facilities, sometimes requiring trans people to avoid spaces aligned with their identity "to avoid conflict".
-

Possible Consequences-

- High levels of stress, reduced psychological safety and lower job satisfaction.
- Withdrawal from team interactions, reduced career progression, or early resignation.
- Legal and reputational risks for employers who fail to comply with anti-discrimination protections.

Possible Underlying causes -

- Lack of explicit gender identity and expression policies.
- Limited awareness and training on trans inclusion.
- Workplace systems and norms built around a rigid binary understanding of gender.

3. Implications for the Situation in Denmark

Across all five Danish cases, several recurring structural patterns emerge:

1. Non-transparent HR and pay practices
   - Discretionary salary step placement and hidden criteria (Case 1).
   - Opaque policy changes with unequal effects (Case 2).
   - Historical wage frameworks not scrutinised for gender impact (Case 3).
2. Gaps between progressive law and everyday practice
   - Strong legal framework on equality and non-discrimination, but persistent pay gaps, glass ceilings and pregnancy discrimination show implementation weaknesses (Cases 1–4).
3. Deep-rooted gender norms and stereotypes
   - Care professions undervalued as "women's work" (Case 3).
   - Leadership imagined and rewarded in male-coded ways (Case 4).

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- Pregnancy viewed as a cost or inconvenience (Case 2).

4. Limited attention to intersectional and LGBTQ+ issues
    - Trans employees face discrimination and exclusion that standard gender policies do not adequately address (Case 5).
5. Reactive rather than preventive approaches
    - Problems are often addressed only after trade unions, courts, or equality bodies intervene, instead of through proactive monitoring and reform (Cases 1–3, 5).

Based on these cases, the situation in Denmark can be characterised as follows:

- Denmark's reputation as a gender-equal country coexists with significant gaps in workplace equality.
- Women still face pay inequalities, both within the same job and through structural undervaluation of women-dominated professions.
- Pregnant workers remain vulnerable to indirect discrimination when HR policies change without proper safeguards.
- The glass ceiling in corporate leadership is pronounced, with very few women in CEO and C-suite roles.
- Trans employees experience misgendering, exclusion and lack of recognition, highlighting the need to extend equality work beyond binary gender.

These cases show that legal frameworks alone are not sufficient. Without transparent systems, gender-sensitive policy design and inclusive cultures, inequalities remain embedded in everyday organisational practice.

4..Conclusion

The Danish bad-practice cases show that gender inequality in the workplace is not an issue that has been "solved", even in a country with strong legal protections and a progressive image. Women can still be paid less for equal work, lose benefits after announcing pregnancy, or work in professions whose value is structurally underestimated. They are also largely missing from the highest corporate positions. Trans employees, meanwhile, face misgendering and exclusion in systems that are not designed with their realities in mind.

For UnlockEquality, Denmark's experience underlines that genuine equality requires transparent systems, preventive policy design, inclusive cultures and accountability. Only when these elements are in place can every worker – regardless of gender, pregnancy status, or gender identity – participate fully, safely and fairly in Danish workplaces.

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SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Across all five partner countries (Malta, Netherlands, Latvia, Croatia, Denmark), the collected bad practices reveal consistent patterns of gender inequality, despite national differences. These patterns affect multiple dimensions of workplace life: pay, opportunities, safety, reproductive rights and inclusion of LGBTQ+ employees.

Key Cross-Country Findings

1. Persistent Gender Pay Inequality
Women are paid less than men for identical roles (Malta, Netherlands, Denmark).
Structural undervaluation of women-dominated professions (Denmark, Croatia).
Lack of pay transparency and inconsistent salary-setting procedures is a common issue across all countries.

2. Pregnancy, Maternity and Parenthood Discrimination
Contracts non-renewed or downgraded after pregnancy announcement (Malta, Netherlands).
Policy changes used indirectly to disadvantage pregnant employees (Denmark).
Interruptions to international assignments or career progression due to pregnancy (Latvia).
IVF-related discrimination and negative assumptions about reproductive choices (Croatia).

3. Barriers to Promotion and Leadership
Women underrepresented in senior roles, especially in STEM, policing and corporate leadership (Netherlands, Latvia, Croatia, Denmark).
Informal networks and subjective decision-making perpetuate male dominance.
Lack of transparent promotion criteria in most countries.

4. Harassment, Abuse of Power & Unsafe Cultures
Sexual harassment and intimidation widely reported in hospitals, universities and workplaces (Malta, Croatia, Denmark).
Aggressive verbal behaviour and humiliation tolerated in hierarchical settings (Latvia).
Reporting systems often weak, slow, or unreliable.

5. Stereotyping and Unequal Task Allocation
Women's expertise questioned more often (Latvia).

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Women given supportive tasks while men receive high-visibility assignments.
"Customer preference" used to justify discriminatory role allocation (Latvia).

6. LGBTQ+ and Trans Inclusion Gaps
Misgendering, exclusion from facilities, lack of transition policies (Malta, Denmark, Netherlands).
HR systems unable to adapt to gender-diverse staff needs.
Very limited awareness training for staff and managers.

Conclusion

Across all countries, gender inequality is systemic, normalised and often hidden in everyday practices, rather than in overt discrimination.

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The reports show that legal frameworks alone do not ensure equality.
Inequality thrives where:

- policies are unclear or unenforced,
- HR systems lack transparency,
- workplace cultures allow bias or harassment, and
- vulnerable groups (pregnant workers, LGBTQ+ employees) lack protection.

These findings shape the foundation for the Practical Checklist the partnership is developing.

GUIDELINE: KEY AREAS FOR THE PARTNERSHIP TO FOCUS ON WHEN DEVELOPING THE PRACTICAL CHECKLIST

Based on the report's cross-country evidence, the partnership should focus on five overarching domains. These domains capture the most consistent risk areas and will ensure the checklist is practical, relevant and applicable across national contexts.

1. ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES & STRUCTURAL SAFEGUARDS

The checklist must help users identify where policies are:
absent,
unclear,
not implemented, or
not monitored.

Key Areas to Include:

- Existence of gender equality and anti-discrimination policies
- Written procedures for complaints and reporting
- Clear rules on pregnancy, parental leave and reproductive rights
- Anti-harassment policies and designated independent contact points
- LGBTQ+ inclusion and gender identity policies
- Transparency of pay structures and promotion criteria

This reflects the systemic gaps identified in Malta, Latvia, Croatia, Denmark and the Netherlands.

2. EVERYDAY BEHAVIOURS & INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS

Inequality is often reproduced through quiet, everyday acts rather than overt discrimination.
Checklist should help detect:

- Microaggressions and subtle exclusion
- Interruptions or dominance in meetings
- Women's ideas being dismissed unless repeated by men
- Unequal distribution of speaking time, credit and visibility
- Aggressive behaviour tolerated from senior men but not others
- "Maternal wall" stereotypes affecting returning mothers

These patterns were found consistently across Latvia, Malta and Croatia.

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3. HR PRACTICES: PAY, RECRUITMENT, TASK ALLOCATION, PROMOTION

A strong checklist should allow users to examine whether HR systems create or reinforce gender inequality.

Checklist areas to include:

- Pay transparency and consistency
- Objective criteria for recruitment and promotion
- Monitoring of salary step placement (NL, DK, MT)
- Fair distribution of tasks
- Access to leadership opportunities and professional development
- Use of data to detect gendered patterns

This reflects findings especially from the Netherlands, Denmark and Latvia.

4. PREGNANCY, MATERNITY & PARENTHOOD

All countries reported discrimination linked to pregnancy or family responsibilities.

Checklist must include indicators for:

- Sudden policy changes after pregnancy announcements (Denmark)
- Non-renewal of contracts or project removal (Malta, Netherlands)
- Unfair treatment upon return from maternity leave (Latvia)
- Penalisation for fertility treatments (Croatia)
- Lack of reintegration plans

The checklist should help users quickly recognise pregnancy-related discrimination, including indirect forms.

5. INCLUSION OF LGBTQ+ & GENDER-DIVERSE EMPLOYEES

Given recurring issues across Malta, Denmark and the Netherlands, this must be a dedicated part of the checklist.

Checklist must include:

- Correct pronoun and name usage
- Access to appropriate facilities
- Transition support policies
- Non-binary inclusion
- Ability to update HR records
- Cultural and awareness training
- Complaints handled sensitively and without delay

This area is essential to ensure the checklist supports *all* employees.

GUIDANCE FOR THE PARTNERSHIP

The final checklist must be:

-Practical -Easy to use by non-experts.

Concrete questions that reveal hidden inequalities.

-Observable-Focus on behaviours, policies and *procedures* that can be seen or verified—not abstract theory.

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- Applicable in workplaces & educational environments- Teachers, youth workers, HR staff, managers, students and employees should all be able to use it.
- Preventive- Helps identify problems before they escalate into harassment or legal cases.
- Action-Oriented Each section should include:
what to look for,
why it matters, and
what action to take.
- Aligned with Project Objectives- Supports awareness, empowerment, skill-building and integration of gender equality principles into daily practice.

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Annex – Sources of Information

Country	Case	Case-study link(s)
Malta	Case 1	https://timesofmalta.com/article/tribunal-takes-four-years-to-decide-it-had-no-jurisdiction-in-pregnant.510996
Malta	Case 2	https://newsbook.com.mt/en/former-mater-dei-chief-nurse-jailed-over-years-of-sexual-abuse-of-subordinate/
Malta	Case 3	https://fifpro.org/en/supporting-players/conditions-of-employment/employment-status/improved-working-conditions-for-maltese-national-women-s-team-players
Malta	Case 4	https://ncpe.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Efforts_to_combat_pregnancy_discrimination.pdf
Malta	Case 5	https://timesofmalta.com/article/trans-woman-alleges-workplace-discrimination-this-makes-sad-mad.1118866
Netherlands	Case 1	https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/economie/artikel/5480518/de-loonkloof-bestaat-nog-steeds
Netherlands	Case 2	https://pure.tue.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/316909893/Master_Thesis_Lonneke_Lardinois.pdf
Netherlands	Case 3	https://nltimes.nl/2023/09/23/reports-sexual-harassment-racism-bullying-dutch-companies-study
Netherlands	Case 4	https://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=153091
Netherlands	Case 5	https://www.transgendernetwerk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Inclusion4All-National-report-Netherlands_EN-Transgender-Netwerk.pdf
Denmark	Case 1	https://fagbladet3f.dk/kvindernes-sidste-arbejdsdag-mange-i-min-branche-mener-at-kvinder-ikke-skal-have-det-samme-i-loen-som-maendene/#:~:text=I%202024%20n%C3%A5ede%20en%20historisk,p%C3%A5%20virksomheden%20Novozymes%2C%20sin%20afslutning
Denmark	Case 2	https://www.domstol.dk/hoejesteret/aktuelt/2024/1/loenmodtager-havde-krav-paa-godtgoerelse/#:~:text=A%20var%20ansat%20som%20ufagl%C3%A6rt,ret%20til%20l%C3%B8n%20under%20barsel
Denmark	Case 3	https://nordics.info/show/artikel/unequal-pay-in-denmark-an-outdated-laws-far-reaching-consequences#:~:text=Danish%20nurses%20still%20receive%2010,also%20received%20the

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Country	Case	Case-study link(s)
		%20requisite%2050%2C000
Denmark	Case 4	https://www.danskindustri.dk/om-di/kontakt-os/presse/arkiv/pressemeddelelser/2024/11/di-direktor-dybt-bekymrende-at-nasten-halvdelen-af-de-danske-virksomheder-ikke-har-kvinder-i-bestyrelserne/#:~:text=,direkt%C3%B8r%2C%20der%20peger%20p%C3%A5%20l%C3%B8sninger
Denmark	Case 5	https://lgbt.dk/ny-rapport-81-af-lgbt-personer-har-oplevet-eller-overvaeret-diskrimination-paa-arbejdspladsen-inden-for-de-sidste-to-aar/#:~:text=Data%20fra%20unders%C3%B8gelsen%20understreger%2C%20at,har%20oplevet%20eller%20overv%C3%A6ret%20episoden https://dm.dk/akademikerbladet/aktuelt/2025/september/lgbtplus-personer-oplever-diskrimination-paa-arbejdspladsen-kalder-paa-handling/#:~:text=Som%20transmand%20har%20han%20p%C3%A5,kommentarer%20kan%20fylde%20i%20arbejdslivet
Croatia	Case 1	https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-207633
Croatia	Case 2	https://www.prs.hr/cms/post/1302
Croatia	Case 3	https://www.prs.hr/cms/post/1178
Croatia	Case 4	https://ravnopravnost.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Europska%20unija/Razlike%20u%20placama%20Hrvatska.pdf
Croatia	Case 5	https://www.prs.hr/cms/post/1139 https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/sveuciliste-u-zagrebu-i-slucajevi-seksualnog-uznemiravanja/2331044.aspx
Latvia	Case 3	https://www.la.lv/nekadas-atlaides-nebus-viss-notiks-ka-parasti-arlietu-ministrijas-darbiniece-parliecinata-ka-darba-vieta-piedzivojusi-diskriminaciju-dzimuma-del https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/18.06.2025-diplomate-rimsa-pirmaja-instance-uzvarejusi-am-lieta-par-diskriminaciju-dzimuma-del.a603770/
Latvia	Case 4	https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/atzinums-parbaudes-lieta-nr-2024-67-26ab.pdf

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