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Gender balance policy in European diplomacy

Abstract. The study aimed to assess the impact of the implementation of gender balance and gender equality policies on the implementation of the EU's foreign policy by analysing policies and quantitative indicators in the diplomatic services of the member states. For a comprehensive analysis, the implementation of the diplomatic missions of Sweden, France and Poland was selected. The research methodology consisted of studying official documents and reports of the European Union and analysing data on the composition of diplomatic missions. The survey results showed that Sweden is the most successful country in terms of gender balance among the sample, with 47% of women holding diplomatic posts. This is a direct result of Sweden's long-standing gender policy and active promotion of reforms. In France, the average is 26% of women in diplomatic institutions. Poland, due to the significant pressure of several factors, from economic to social, has low gender balance indicators not only in the sample but also in Europe as a whole. In Poland, there are about 21% of women in the diplomatic services. These figures demonstrated the existence of obstacles arising from "traditional views" and the lack of adequate state support. The study determined that although the percentage of women in the diplomatic services in Europe is 29%, the difference between individual EU countries is large and often depends on economic, cultural, and social factors. Although most EU countries have made progress in gender balance policies, the level of success has largely depended on several factors, such as national traditions, specific cultural and social norms, and the level of political freedom. The findings of this study can be used as a basis for additional research and formulation of recommendations for countries that face challenges in implementing successful gender policies

Keywords: social barriers; cultural stereotypes; career development; government initiatives; institutional barriers; sexism

Introduction

To address the challenges faced by men and women in the diplomatic services daily objectively and diversely, it is necessary to maintain a gender balance in the workforce. Maintaining a gender balance is important for fairness and equality, as well as for effective policy and development of the country in the international arena. Given that, due to different socio-cultural and historical aspects, European Union (EU) countries have different policies on gender balance, it is necessary to analyse the current situation and the dynamics of changes in this area. It is necessary to identify successful practices, problematic aspects of gender policy implementation, and the nuances and reasons for different approaches to integrating gender equality in different social and cultural contexts.

As of July 2024, many studies were conducted on gender equality in all spheres of public life, including politics, business, education, etc. For instance, a study conducted by the United Nations shows that, despite the efforts of international organisations and national governments, women remain underrepresented in the diplomatic services

of many countries (UN Women & UN DESA, 2023). Previous studies of gender balance in the diplomatic services have been conducted by numerous scholars. According to E. Hedling (2024), a comprehensive approach is needed to address gender equality in diplomacy, including the introduction of quotas, promoting conditions for women's professional advancement, and combating gender stereotypes.

The importance of fundamental shifts in approaches, and systematic integration of gender issues in all aspects of the diplomatic and political service was explored by K. Aggestam & A. Towns (2018) and S. Preti & E. di Bella (2023). The authors emphasised that ensuring equal opportunities for women requires global changes, including revision of recruitment and promotion policies, as well as the introduction of leadership development programmes for women. The authors also emphasise the need to create an inclusive work environment where gender stereotypes are actively challenged. In addition, the study points to the importance of international cooperation to share good practices and adapt them to national contexts.

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R. Cabaleiro & E. Buch (2024) emphasise the importance of equal representation of genders to improve the effectiveness of diplomatic services and decision-making. L. Grundell (2023) analysed the political aspects of gender equality, including the need to support women in leadership positions and overcome political barriers to their advancement. A. Michalski (2022) addressed the peculiarities of the functioning of diplomatic services in the EU and the impact on gender policy. The author analysed how the implementation of European gender equality policies affects diplomatic practice and the professional advancement of women. The study emphasised that ensuring equal opportunities in this context requires not only the introduction of quotas but also systematic support through specialised training and mentoring programmes.

B. Niklasson & A. Towns (2023) analysed patterns of gender representation in diplomacy and their symbolic impact on the international community. The authors argued that the presence of women in high diplomatic positions not only promotes gender equality but also increases the symbolic status of the country in the international arena. They also highlight the importance of political will and structural changes to achieve a sustainable gender balance in the diplomatic services. G. Belova & A. Ivanova (2022) highlighted the importance of mentoring programmes and support networks for women diplomats.

A review of the existing literature suggested that the impact of national cultural traits and political determination on achieving gender equality in diplomatic services has not been thoroughly investigated. The effectiveness of certain policies and initiatives aimed at increasing women's representation in diplomacy requires deeper and more detailed research. The study aimed to examine the gender balance policies in the diplomatic services of Sweden, France and Poland to identify effective strategies and problem areas. The key objectives of the study were:

- ◆ analysis of the current state of gender balance in the diplomatic services of Sweden, France and Poland;
- ◆ assessment of the effectiveness of national policies and initiatives aimed at ensuring gender equality in diplomacy;
- ◆ assessment of the impact of national cultural and social contexts on the implementation of gender equality policies.

Materials and Methods

The sample for the study included statistics and reports from various countries, which were selected based on representativeness to reflect the global picture. The sample included data from countries such as Sweden, France, and Poland. These countries were chosen because of their diverse approach to gender equality and the availability of data. The research was conducted in several stages. At the stage of primary analysis, the main literary and statistical sources were collected and systematised, which allowed to creation of a database that included quantitative and qualitative indicators of gender equality in the diplomatic services. Official reports from the UN and the European Commission were used to collect data. The main sources were the official reports and studies of UN Women (2018), UN Women & UNDESA (2023), and the official reports of the European Commission (2000; 2020; 2023a; 2023b; 2023c).

After that, a systematic analysis of each source was conducted in terms of methodology, reliability and relevance, as well as an analysis of the main trends and differences between countries and international organisations. At the analysis stage, data from different sources were compared to identify commonalities and differences in approaches to gender equality, as well as to study the impact of international organisations on national gender equality strategies.

The study used quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. The quantitative analysis included the percentage of women in senior positions, the total number of women in the diplomatic services, the level of remuneration, the number of female ambassadors and dunes, and the number of policy programmes aimed at gender equality. The qualitative analysis included a study of the context of the services' activities. The analysis included a comparison of the data from different countries and organisations to identify best practices and key challenges in ensuring gender equality.

Another important aspect was to consider UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325 (2000), which emphasises the importance of women's participation in decision-making and states that member states are obliged to ensure increased representation of women at all levels of decision-making in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. Considering these and other normative documents was used to ensure a comprehensive and scientifically sound approach to analysing gender equality in the diplomatic services.

Results

An overview of the gender balance in the EU diplomatic services. The EU actively promotes gender equality at all levels, including foreign policy and diplomatic services. EU policy on gender equality is set out in the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Official Journal of the European Communities (2000). The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (2020) is also significant. One of the main principles is to ensure equal political opportunities for men and women in all spheres of life, including economic and social.

The Treaty of Lisbon (2007) sets out the legal framework for EU action on gender equality. The second article of the document states that the EU is based on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The Treaty of Lisbon (2007) states that the EU will fight social exclusion and discrimination and promote social justice and equality between women and men. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000), which came into force with the Lisbon Treaty (2007), also ensures equality for men and women. The Charter states that equality between men and women should be ensured in all fields, including labour, employment and remuneration. The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (2020) sets out the main objectives and areas of EU action in this area. This strategy aims to eliminate gender disparities, increase women's participation in all spheres of public life, ensure equal opportunities for women and men, support pay equality, improve work-life balance, and ensure

effective protection of women's rights in all aspects of life. Another important component of the Strategy is to address the issue of gender stereotypes. Gender bias is a significant obstacle to achieving true equality. They affect the choice of professional and career paths and social roles, limiting opportunities for women and men. The Strategy contains various measures aimed at overcoming these stereotypes, such as awareness-raising campaigns, changes in the educational system and public awareness, in line with UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325 (2000). This will contribute to a new perception of the roles and capabilities of people, regardless of their gender, which is an important step in creating a just society.

Another focus of The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (2020) is to ensure equal opportunities in employment and remuneration. This means supporting gender equality in the workplace, ensuring equal opportunities for career development, and removing barriers for women in all areas. Measures aimed at reducing the gender pay gap are important for achieving economic equality and social justice.

The European Union has also introduced several projects and programmes to ensure gender equality in the diplomatic services of its member states, including pan-European programmes and special measures to support women in diplomacy and ensure equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of country. The Women in Diplomacy Programme (European External Action, 2022) is an EU initiative to support women diplomats in the Member States. The programme includes a mentoring, development and networking programme for women diplomats. The mentoring programme helps women diplomats receive support and advice on career development, while the training and networking events facilitate the exchange of experience and the creation of useful connections. Beyond this, the European External Action Service (EEAS) is actively working to ensure gender equality within its structures through an equal opportunities policy aimed at increasing the representation of women in the diplomatic service at all levels. These actions include creating a favourable environment for women's professional development and overcoming discrimination and gender bias. Through these initiatives, the EEAS demonstrates how gender equality can be successfully integrated into foreign policy and diplomacy.

Additionally, the European Union has implemented the Gender Action Plan III: Key Areas of EU Engagement (European External Action Service, 2020), a comprehensive plan that includes measures to increase the presence of women in the diplomatic service, combat gender-based violence and promote gender equality in international relations. The plan includes specific steps and measures aimed at overcoming existing barriers and ensuring equal opportunities for all, indispensable for achieving gender balance.

The EU is actively working to promote gender equality in the diplomatic service of its member states. These initiatives and programmes contribute to a more just and equal society, where everyone, regardless of gender, can fulfil their potential and contribute to the development of diplomacy and international relations. Thanks to the gender balance policy, the percentage of women in the diplomatic services of the European Union has risen to 29%,

according to the Global Government Forum (Moss, 2017).

Despite significant progress in achieving gender equality in the EU diplomatic services, many challenges need to be addressed. One of the main obstacles to achieving full gender equality is the prevalence of gender stereotypes and biases (Sinha & Bibhakar, 2023), which often prevent women from holding senior positions in the diplomatic service, limit their career opportunities and hinder their professional growth. Society's perceptions of the standard responsibilities of men and women create obstacles that are difficult to overcome without targeted action by the government and civil society organisations.

In addition, limited support from governments and the lack of effective mechanisms to ensure equal opportunities pose significant challenges. Many countries, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Greece, do not have specific policies or programmes to support women diplomats. It is often difficult for women to gain access to leadership positions, and their achievements are often not recognised and appreciated.

Socio-cultural barriers also play a significant role in reducing women's participation in diplomacy. In some countries, women may face restrictions on their active participation in public and professional life due to cultural norms and traditions. In countries with patriarchal traditions, such as Hungary, Poland, or Slovakia, women's roles are limited to domestic duties and family care, making it difficult to overcome these limitations. In such cases, women are often unable to take advantage of the resources and opportunities needed to further develop their careers in the diplomatic service (Okładnaya & Menkova, 2020).

Ensuring a gender balance in the EU diplomatic service is essential for equal opportunities for women and men in international relations. This is achieved through the implementation of policies, initiatives and programmes aimed at supporting women in the diplomatic field. As a result of these sustained efforts, the proportion of women in senior diplomatic positions has been steadily increasing (European Commission, 2023c), demonstrating the progress made in this area. Women bring with them a variety of experiences, perspectives and approaches, which enriches discussions and contributes to more effective policies. In addition, the increasing number of women in leadership positions sends an important signal to future generations, demonstrating that diplomacy is an accessible and attractive career for women.

Gender balance in the diplomatic services of the European Union: Sweden, France and Poland. Maintaining a gender balance in diplomacy is an important part of modern politics, as ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in this area contributes to balanced and inclusive decision-making in the international arena. Diplomatic services are one of the key chains in international and inter-political communication. Diplomatic staff are among the first to face global conflicts and help resolve them. Therefore, achieving gender equality in this area is essential for increasing the effectiveness and fairness of diplomatic processes.

Some EU countries have made significant progress in ensuring gender equality in their diplomatic services. For instance, in Sweden, women make up about 47% of the total number of employees in the diplomatic services

(Government Offices of Sweden, 2024). Such results are achieved through the implementation of targeted policies and initiatives aimed at maintaining gender balance. Sweden is often at the top of the gender equality rankings, thanks to the collective efforts of the government and the people. Sweden's gender equality policy covers all aspects of life, from the general labour market situation to political life.

One of the most effective elements of Swedish policy has been the policy of gender mainstreaming, or gender mainstreaming, which provides for equal gender integration in all spheres of life. This approach requires all state institutions to consider gender aspects in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes. An important component of this strategy is the "Jämställdhetsintegrering i statliga myndigheter" (JIM) programme (Swedish Government, 2021), which covers most Swedish public institutions. It includes a wide range of measures to ensure gender equality. These measures include systematic analysis of the impact of socio-economic conditions such as employment rates, access to education, wages, work-life balance, and access to leadership positions. It also includes mandatory gender mainstreaming in the budgeting process and the provision of specialised training for civil servants on gender issues. In addition, JIM ensures ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of gender policies, which allows for the timely identification and elimination of inequalities.

This programme is based on the principle that gender equality is a fundamental condition for sustainable development and social justice. It promotes equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of gender, and helps to combat discrimination. JIM also encourages government agencies to introduce innovative approaches to gender equality, including through the development of mentoring programmes for women, flexible work schedules, and work-life balance. The use of international best practices and research helps to ensure the effectiveness of these measures.

The Discrimination Act of Sweden No. 2008:567 (2008) on wage equality is another important initiative. This law obliges employers to conduct an annual salary analysis to identify and eliminate gender gaps. Employers are also required to document the annual analysis and implement appropriate actions and solutions to address any inequalities. The Government Offices of Sweden (2024) reports that in 2021, women accounted for approximately 47% of the total number of employees in the Swedish diplomatic services. This figure, one of the highest in the EU (Finland ranks first among EU member states with a rating of 49.5%), best demonstrates the results of gender policy. Thus, Sweden demonstrates an example of the successful integration of gender equality into all aspects of public administration and public life, which contributes to a more inclusive and fair society.

Despite a long history of implementing progressive reforms and policies aimed at ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men, France remains gender-imbalanced (UN Women, 2021). The most effective step in the field of gender equality in France is Title IV "Occupational Equality between Men and Women" in the French Labour Code (2008). This law has become an important step in ensuring equal rights and opportunities

for women and men in all spheres of life, especially in the labour market. It obliges companies to develop and implement specific action plans aimed at eliminating the gender pay gap (L3221-2, L1142-1). This includes identifying and eliminating gender discrimination in recruitment, promotion and working conditions.

The law provides for the creation of detailed salary reports that must be analysed for gender imbalance and sets clear requirements for companies to develop action plans to address identified gaps (L1142-8). The French Labour Code (2008) also introduces a mandatory quota for women in the governing bodies of large companies, which significantly increases their presence in leadership positions. The introduction of quotas has become an important tool in the fight against gender stereotypes and has contributed to the greater visibility of women in corporate leadership (L1142-9). It also contributed to changing corporate culture, making it more inclusive and equality oriented.

Such measures help to increase the level of women's participation in the governing bodies of large companies in France (French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2023), which is a significant step towards achieving gender equality. This reform has contributed not only to increasing economic opportunities for women but also to creating a fairer and more equal society where everyone has an equal chance of success regardless of gender. France actively involves women in decision-making at the international level, within its diplomatic missions. *De jure* and *de facto*, the percentage of women in senior positions in diplomatic missions is increasing. They are also provided with equal conditions for their professional growth. These efforts are aimed at creating a more balanced representation of women and men in international relations, which, in turn, contributes to more effective and inclusive decision-making. France is actively involved in international programmes to integrate gender equality, such as GAP III (Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council No. SWD (2020) 284 final, 2020), which helps to improve national policies and increase the effectiveness of their implementation. Most of the successes in the field of gender balance in the diplomatic service have been achieved thanks to participation in international programmes regulated by the EU and strict penalties for non-compliance with the norms and quotas already implemented in French legislation.

According to the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2024), in 2021, women accounted for only 21% of the total number of ambassadors. At that time, the level of gender equality in the diplomatic services was insufficient, and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs paid a fine of 450,000 EUR for the insufficient percentage of women in leadership positions. Despite these difficulties, the situation is gradually improving. In 2023, the percentage of female ambassadors in France increased to 26%. This demonstrates the gradual progress made through the implementation of government initiatives and reforms aimed at ensuring gender equality. France continues to implement new and consistent policies, working to remove barriers for women and demonstrating a proactive approach to gender equality through important reforms and legislative changes.

Regarding Poland, it is worth noting that the national gender policy remains underdeveloped and ineffective. Due to the pressure of patriarchal institutions that are deeply embedded in all aspects of life, the percentage of women in diplomatic consulates is low, and the percentage in leadership positions is even lower (Chehab, 2023). To join the EU, Poland had to adopt certain programmes and fulfil certain conditions. It is difficult to assess the extent to which EU accession has affected Poland's gender equality policies and mechanisms, but it is certain that changes to labour laws that require employers to take measures to address gender inequality including the introduction of flexible working hours (Republic of Poland, 2004), and the adoption of the Act of the Republic of Poland "On the Implementation of Some Regulations of the European Union Regarding Equal Remedies" (2010), should have led to more significant changes than those observed as of 2025. The Cabinet of Ministers has also adopted the Polish National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2018), which includes clear goals and objectives to improve the gender balance in the diplomatic service. This strategy, in combination with Resolution of the Council of Ministers of Poland No. 113 "On the Establishment of the National Action Programme for Equal Treatment for 2022-2030" (2022), envisages creating conditions for equal access to career development, ensuring gender parity in recruitment and promotion, and supporting women in diplomatic careers through training and mentoring.

The structure of priorities in Poland significantly affected gender equality, prioritising the labour market, reconciliation of family life and work, and the social protection system over other areas where gender equality needs to be implemented. As noted by A. Grzybek (2009), EU accession transformed the gender discourse and approaches to addressing gender equality, shifting the focus from women's rights to equality and anti-discrimination. As a result, the struggle for women's rights is no longer a private issue, and their rights have become part of the mainstream discourse. The implementation of the above-mentioned policies and programmes has resulted in an improvement in the gender balance in the Polish diplomatic service, where the percentage of women in the state's missions is 20% (GP, 2019). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the Polish government did not sign GAP III, as described above, and many regulations were introduced only because Poland was obliged to harmonise national legislation with EU directives and regulations, in particular Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and the Council (2006), to join the EU.

According to S. Chehab (2023), the share of women in the Polish diplomatic services increased from 20% in 2019-2022 to 21% in 2023. However, this figure is still below the EU average of 29% (European Commission, 2023a; 2023b). This progress is the result of targeted efforts by the Polish government and civil society organisations that are actively improving the gender balance. The introduction of quotas for leadership positions has helped to increase the share of women in leadership positions in various sectors, including the diplomatic service. However, despite positive developments, many challenges remain. For example, the gender pay gap is still significant (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Poland, 2018),

which creates additional barriers for women to achieve professional success. Thus, the implementation of policies aimed at enhancing gender equality in Poland still requires some improvement. On the one hand, the legislative framework formally guarantees equal opportunities in all spheres of life, including diplomacy, but on the other hand, a national gender equality mechanism as a politically independent body has not been established.

A comparison of gender equality in the diplomatic services in Sweden, France and Poland reveals significant differences in approaches and results. Sweden and France demonstrate successful models of gender equality integration through systemic reforms and active political initiatives. Poland, on the other hand, faces significant challenges due to cultural and social barriers that make it difficult to achieve equality. Sweden, France and Poland have different approaches to gender equality, reflecting their national characteristics. Sweden stands out for its comprehensive and integrated policies, which include laws, quotas and social programmes that create an inclusive environment. The Swedish government supports and promotes gender equality in all aspects of life. From social and domestic aspects to an active policy of promoting women in leadership positions, justifying this not only by the importance of fairness but also by economic and political benefits for society. With the highest gender equality rate among the sample in this study (47% in Sweden, 26% in France, and 21% in Poland, when the EU average is 29%), the Swedish government is proving the effectiveness of its laws, reforms and programmes. The JIM programme, which involves 54 Swedish authorities, is an example of an effective equality mainstreaming policy.

Upon joining the EU, Poland also implemented several measures to increase gender equality, which are mandatory for the EU (Act of the Republic of Poland "On the Implementation of...", 2010). Although its approach is less comprehensive than that of Sweden and France, the percentage of women in the diplomatic service is growing. The slow growth of the percentage of women is explained by the fact that Poland has not implemented such strict requirements as Sweden or France. In general, the comparative analysis shows that to achieve gender equality in the diplomatic service, a comprehensive approach is needed, which includes both legislative changes and educational and cultural measures. Sweden and France have demonstrated the effectiveness of such approaches, while Poland needs to make additional efforts to overcome existing barriers. A comprehensive approach that addresses all aspects of society is key to achieving sustainable progress in gender equality.

Discussion

The study of gender equality policies in Sweden, France and Poland shows that each of these countries has a different approach to integrating gender equality. Sweden has demonstrated a high level of integration of gender balance policy in all aspects of public administration, while France and Poland have less success and challenges in this area. Sweden has made significant progress through its "Jämställdhetsintegrering i Myndigheter" (JIM) policy, which includes the systematic implementation of gender equality in public bodies. The study provides

evidence to support these results. The study by K. Aggestam & B. Rosamond (2019) confirms the results obtained. This conclusion was also reached by T. Zheliuk & U. Kostin (2022), who note that Sweden is a leader in the implementation of gender equality.

France has introduced quotas for women in managerial positions and adopted several legislative initiatives aimed at ensuring gender equality. The study shows that these initiatives have led to an increase in the representation of women in the highest echelons of politics and diplomacy, but their impact is limited. This is consistent with the findings of R. Art *et al.* (2023), who note that while France has made progress in increasing women's representation, it faces challenges in other areas, such as wage inequality and access to senior positions. Also important for France are the obstacles that cannot be solved through legislative initiatives alone. This correlates with the results of N. Miller (2023), who point to the need for a comprehensive approach to achieve real gender equality.

Poland demonstrates the lowest level of gender equality integration among the three countries, in terms of the gender gap in the diplomatic service. This is confirmed by M. de Silva (2024), which indicates that Polish gender equality policy is less effective than in other European countries. The results of this study show that the impact of gender policies on social and economic equality varies from country to country.

K. Aggestam & A. Towns (2018) noted that the transition to gender-responsive diplomacy, as in the case of Sweden, can be used as a model for other countries. The results of this study confirm this conclusion: Sweden demonstrates significant progress in integrating gender equality in government agencies and public institutions, which indicates the effectiveness of gender-oriented strategies. However, R. Cabaleiro & E. Buch (2024) point out that successes in one area do not always extend to other aspects of social equality. This is confirmed by the research data: France has made progress in increasing the representation of women in politics and business, but it still faces challenges in terms of wages and access to high positions, which demonstrates the need for a comprehensive approach to gender equality. In this context, the studies by M. Okladnaya & L. Menkova (2020) and M. Okladnaya *et al.* (2021) highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality, where diplomatic services are only part of a broader strategy. Achieving real gender equality requires not only legislative initiatives but also consideration of cultural and social aspects.

C. Weber (2021) demonstrated that gender quotas can increase women's representation in senior management, but their effectiveness is limited without changing social norms and cultural beliefs. The results of this study confirm this: even with quotas in place, as in France, additional measures are needed to ensure true equality. E. Fiata (2023) emphasises the role of cooperation between the public and private sectors in successful gender policies. The results show that in Sweden, this cooperation is a key success factor, while in France and Poland, such integration still needs to be improved. E. Hedling (2024) emphasises the importance of considering the economic conditions and social structures of each country for the successful implementation of gender policies. The

current study demonstrated that in Poland, where the economic and social situation is significantly different from Sweden and France, gender equality policies have not achieved significant success. This highlights the need to adapt policies to local conditions.

These comparisons confirm the importance of a comprehensive and tailored approach to implementing gender equality policies that address the cultural, social and economic characteristics of each country. Studies from other countries also point to the need for continuous improvement and adaptation of policies to achieve real equality. The analysis shows that there is a significant need for more research focusing on different aspects of gender policies and their impact. One of the key areas is to study more deeply the impact of cultural and social factors on the effectiveness of gender equality policies. N. Kosakowska-Berezecka *et al.* (2024) emphasised the importance of taking gender stereotypes and beliefs into account when implementing policies. This highlights the need for further analysis of how cultural contexts, historical traditions and social norms influence the perception and implementation of gender initiatives. It is important to determine how specific cultural and social contexts can influence the adoption and effectiveness of policies, and how these factors can be addressed to improve outcomes.

There is also a need to analyse possible negative aspects of gender policies. L. Grundell (2023) highlights the need to analyse negative consequences, such as the redistribution of resources or the emergence of new forms of discrimination. Further research should explore how to avoid such negative effects to ensure a more equitable and effective approach to gender equality. This includes analysing potential conflicts of interest, changes in resource allocation and the impact of policies on different social groups. There is a need to study the long-term effects of gender policies. Much existing research focuses on short-term outcomes, but it is important to consider how policies affect social and economic structures in the long term. This may include examining changes in social norms, economic performance and social mobility.

In summary, the study confirms the importance and effectiveness of gender equality policies in the diplomatic services in Sweden, France and Poland, but also reveals significant challenges faced by these countries. Sweden has demonstrated success in integrating gender equality, but additional efforts are needed to ensure inclusiveness. France has made progress in increasing the representation of women in embassies but still faces challenges in other areas. Poland needs significant reforms to improve its gender equality policy in all areas.

Conclusions

The study analysed approaches to gender equality in the diplomatic services of Sweden, France and Poland. The results of the study revealed several significant findings that are important for both theoretical and practical aspects of implementation. The study determined that success in implementing gender policies can vary significantly depending on the context, which emphasises the need for a comprehensive and adapted approach to achieve equality. The high level of women's participation in political life and leadership positions in these coun-

tries is evidence of the effectiveness of the reforms. For example, in Sweden, women account for 47% of diplomatic staff, and they often hold the position of ambassadors. In France, legislative changes have significantly increased the share of women in the diplomatic services and senior positions to 26%. In Poland, however, cultural barriers and patriarchal stereotypes that limit women's opportunities for professional development and political participation have a significant impact on gender equality. The share of women in the diplomatic services increased from 20% in 2019-2022 to 21% in 2023.

The data analysis showed that gender-oriented policies, as demonstrated by the example of Sweden, can significantly contribute to achieving social and economic equality. In Sweden, where a gender balance policy has been actively implemented for 10 years, a high percentage of women are involved in the diplomatic service. This confirmed the effectiveness of a systematic approach to integrating gender equality into state and public institutions.

At the same time, the research findings showed that success in one area does not always lead to achievements in others. For instance, while France has made significant progress in increasing women's representation in politics and business, serious challenges remain in other aspects of gender equality, such as the wage gap and the lack of women in senior management positions. Consequently,

this minimises the interest of women and, consequently, the number of ambassadors. This suggests the need for a more comprehensive approach that addresses all aspects of gender equality, not just individual elements. The study also confirmed that it is important to consider cultural and social aspects in the implementation of gender policies. Despite the existence of legislative initiatives, as seen in the case of France and Poland, it is not enough to implement new laws. It is also necessary to change the social norms and cultural beliefs that influence the implementation of policies and directly increase the percentage of women in the diplomatic service. This underscores the importance of integrating cultural and social factors into strategies for implementing gender initiatives.

Further research on gender equality in the diplomatic services could cover several areas. A more detailed analysis of the impact of cultural and social barriers on the implementation of gender policies is worthwhile, including a study of regional and local peculiarities that may affect the realisation of equal opportunities for women.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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