

Latvia

About

Prior to 2004, the European Union (EU) accession process played an essential role in promoting gender mainstreaming in Latvia, with the EU Equality Directives being transposed into national law and principles enshrined in the fundamental EU Treaties being applied in national legislation and policy-making.

[Article 91](#), amended to the 1922 Latvian Constitution in 1998, states that 'All human beings in Latvia shall be equal before the law and the courts. Human rights shall be realised without discrimination of any kind'. Although there is no specific provision on gender equality, various laws in specific policy areas (e.g. labour law) entail provisions on gender equality. With respect to Latvia's actions on equal opportunities at European level, gender equality is included as a horizontal priority for actions undertaken by the European Social Fund (ESF) and by all EU Structural Funds in the period 2007–2013.

At national level, gender equality is ensured by the Minister of Welfare, who is responsible for planning, implementing and coordinating gender equality policy, despite the lack of formal legislation assigning responsibility for gender equality matters to a government body. Overall, awareness of gender equality and its importance in action plans, strategies and budgets is very limited at national level [1]. In general terms, there remains a prevailing perception that inequality between women and men at work and during social activities is acceptable and even positive.

Legislative and policy framework

Latvia does not have a specific legal regulation on gender equality, although the prevention of discrimination on the grounds of sex [2] is legislated under various laws. Initially, gender equality principles were integrated into the area of labour relations. Over the years, gender equality has developed further and has been embedded in policy areas such as social protection, social insurance, employment, education and healthcare, as well as the provision of goods and services in both the public and private sectors.

While there is a similar lack of a legal basis for gender mainstreaming, Latvia's commitment is evident in its strategic documents. The first Concept Paper on Gender Equality Implementation (2001) established gender mainstreaming as an approach for developing, implementing and sustaining gender equality. This Concept Paper was used as the basis for the development of further action plans and documents. Since then, it has been adjusted and improved in response to economic, social, and political changes and increasing awareness of how gender pervades all government policies.

Gender mainstreaming has thus been at the centre of each of the policy action plans adopted by the government in 2004, 2007, 2012, and 2018. These plans focused on different aspects of gender mainstreaming, including raising awareness of integrated, coordinated implementation of gender equality issues and the development of sustainable institutional mechanisms.

The Plan for the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men for 2018–2020 [3] aims to promote integrated, purposeful and efficient implementation of sectoral policies. The plan is in line with the EU Roadmap for Gender Equality. The objectives set out in the Plan focus on five directions of action:

- 1 Promotion of economic independence and equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market.
- 2 Promotion of equal educational opportunities for girls and boys, women and men.
- 3 Reduction of the prevalence of gender-based violence.
- 4 Strengthening the capacity of authorities in gender equality issues.
- 5 Educating the public in gender equality issues.

To increase public understanding – and that of the relevant authorities - of each of the selected sectoral policies and their connection with gender equality principles, one field will be targeted each year.

The Ministry of Welfare is responsible for the implementation of the Plan, in close cooperation with other ministries, the Ombudsman, social partners and gender equality NGOs. No budget is foreseen for the implementation of the plan, but, rather, activities are intended to be implemented within the framework of the state budget resources granted to the relevant authorities. This is considered a key weakness of the Plan, as it provides no specific fund for pursuing gender equality. Other issues are the lack of specific evaluation procedures, and the fact that evaluation is undertaken only at the end of the planning period and is carried out by the Ministry of Welfare itself.

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Structures

Government responsibilities

Although there is no national legislation (laws or regulations) that serves as a legal basis to assign gender equality responsibilities to a specific government body/public institution, the Ministry of Welfare has been responsible for the development of gender equality policy in the government since 1999 [4]. Since 2003, gender equality issues have been the responsibility of the Department of European and Legal Affairs, of which the Gender Equality Unit was originally a part. In December 2009, gender equality became part of the policy field of the Equal Opportunities Division, together with equal opportunities for people with disabilities and social inclusion policy. Since 2012, the Gender Equality Unit is integrated into the Social Policy Planning and Development Department at the Ministry of Welfare.

The Social Policy Planning and Development Department is responsible for the coordination of gender equality policy, monitoring and assessment. It is also tasked with the promotion of programmes and projects and assessing their political impact from a gender equality perspective. This encompasses research or analysis of gender equality issues, and information, publishing and training events. In 2018, two members of the Social Policy Planning and Development Department dealt directly with gender equality issues, supported by the Director of the Department and the Deputy State Secretary.

The Committee of Gender Equality was established within the Ministry of Welfare by Ministerial Order [5], to ensure effective coordination of the activities performed by different ministries, social partners, NGOs and other relevant actors. It is composed of representatives from state administration institutions and government agencies, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Ombudsman, social partners and other organisations and institutions competent in gender equality issues. The Committee's main task is to provide support, thus it has no direct policy-making or legislative function. It provides expertise to policy makers by giving its opinion on legislative proposals and possible legislation and policy developments. In addition, it summarises research activities and their findings, and analyses statistical data, court cases and other relevant information.

Independent gender equality body

According to the Ombudsman Law (Section 11, point 2), one of the main functions of the office is 'to promote the compliance with the principles of equal treatment and prevention of any discrimination'. The Ombudsman examines complaints of discrimination against private persons and offers legal protection for the victims of discrimination, as well as legal counselling. The office of the Ombudsman does not actively pursue gender equality, as distinct from gender-based discrimination.

Parliamentary bodies

There is no specific representative elected body focused on gender equality in the parliament of Latvia. Traditionally, gender equality issues fall under the competence of the parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Public Affairs. The involvement of this Committee with gender issues, however, is minimal.

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Methods and tools

Note: the methods and tools listed under this section were the focus of EIGE's 2018-2019 assessment. If certain methods and tools are not mentioned in this section, this does not necessarily mean that they are not used at all by Latvia.

The Committee of Gender Equality at the Ministry of Welfare coordinates the tasks of gender mainstreaming. It meets quarterly and promotes the use of various gender mainstreaming tools:

- 1 gender analysis;
- 2 gender awareness-raising;
- 3 gender budgeting;
- 4 gender impact assessment [6];
- 5 gender indicators;
- 6 gender monitoring [7];
- 7 gender statistics; and
- 8 sex-disaggregated data.

A methodology has only been developed for sex-disaggregated data. Gender impact assessment has formed part of larger equal opportunities impact assessments.

In March 2019, the mid-term evaluation of the impact of EU funds on the achievement of the horizontal principle 'Equal opportunities' (which promotes gender equality, anti-discrimination, the rights of persons with disabilities, and inclusion) was carried out for the 2014-2020 programming period [8]. Gender equality was one of four aspects analysed, with the impact assessment concluding that 'in the area of gender equality, there is a growing awareness of the importance of equal opportunities in all areas of life, regardless of gender'.

With respect to gender budgeting, a regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers foresees the results of budget analysis should be disaggregated by sex.

Training and awareness-raising

Government employees participate in gender equality training on an ad hoc basis. There is no specific legal basis for compulsory gender equality training. The Plan for the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men for 2018–2020 includes the aim of strengthening the capacity of authorities in respect of gender equality. It aims to educate officials and public administration staff on gender equality and sets several related targets: one training session for high-level officials [9]; three training sessions for employees of public bodies [10]; and eight workshops for employees of federal agencies involved in the management and administration of EU funds [11]. The Plan specifies the number of training sessions but not the number of participants [12]. The Ministry of Welfare has been charged with organising these training sessions, in cooperation with the State Chancellery and the Society Integration Foundation.

The Ministry of Welfare newsletter on gender equality provides information about news and events related to gender equality policy [13]. The Ministry also produces some materials for its target groups, in the form of brochures, leaflets and online publications, for example, on issues such as violence against women. These publications often form part of the deliverables of other projects [14].

Gender statistics

The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia collects statistical data disaggregated by sex. Primary information is also presented disaggregated by gender (e.g. the Statistical Yearbook). More specific data are collected but not necessarily presented by gender. If a ministry is interested in sex-disaggregated data for certain issues, it can break the data down by gender and include the analysis in its own publications. Some government institutions still do not collect sex-disaggregated data on their services, however. The Central Statistical Bureau also carries out research (e.g. Workforce Survey, Statistical Bulletin on Household Budget, statistical data collection on Time Use of the Population of Latvia, etc.). These surveys include data and analysis from a gender perspective, and the research and publications are publicly available on the Bureau's website.

The complete information on sex-disaggregated data is summarised regularly (once every three years) in the [publication 'Women and Men in Latvia'](#). This collection of statistics aims to provide statistical information on the status of women and men in society: numbers of women and men, age and ethnicity, number of marriages and divorces, fertility and mortality, morbidity, employment, unemployment, wages and salaries, income, at-risk-of-poverty rate, social protection, education, tourism, use of information technology, crime, and representation in legislative and executive institutions.

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Good practices

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References

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Endnotes

[1] Dzimuma aspekta ietekmes analīze valsts un pašvaldību budžeta procesos (Gender impact aspect implementation in the state and municipal budgetary processes) (2017).

- [2] The term 'sex' is used in Latvian for gender equality. In Latvian the term 'gender equality' is translated as sex equality, accordingly law prohibits discrimination based on sex.
- [3] It is important to stress that the title of the action plan has changed from 'Gender Equality Action Plan' to 'Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men'. This reflects an attempt to stay away from the controversies stemming from use of the term 'gender'.
- [4] The functions and competence of the Ministry of Welfare are set out in the By-law of the Ministry of Welfare, [Cabinet Regulation No. 49](#), adopted on 27 January 2004.
- [5] The Committee was set up by the [Ministerial Order of 10 May 2010](#).
- [6] In Latvia, a kind of gender impact assessment was partly introduced as a part of the mid-term evaluation carried out for the Ministry of Finance, as the Managing Authority of EU Funds' implementation.
- [7] The latest gender monitoring report is the '[Informative Report on the Implementation of the Plan for the Implementation of Gender Equality for 2012-2014](#);
- [8] Baltic Institute of Social Sciences (2019). [The mid-term evaluation of the impact of the EU funds](#) on the achievement of the horizontal principle 'Equal opportunities', promoting gender equality, the rights of persons with disabilities and inclusion, antidiscrimination in the 2014-2020 programming period.
- [9] The training is planned as part of the ESF-funded project implemented by the State Chancellery for capacity-building among higher level officials.
- [10] Training will be funded from the budget of the Ministry of Welfare.

[11] The workshops are planned as part of the ESF-funded project implemented by the Ministry of Welfare, aimed at fostering the functions of the coordinating body for the implementation of the horizontal principle of equal opportunities.

[12] Such training, where it takes place, is ad hoc and is foreseen as part of the activities of other projects implemented by public bodies or NGOs. For example, in 2017, the Society Integration Foundation implemented a pilot project on gender budgeting and organised a series of seminars with almost 100 participants.

[13] Ministry of Welfare. [Newsletter on gender equality issues](#).

[14] Ministry of Welfare. [Information about projects and events in the domain of gender equality](#).