

# **ESTONIA**

## **Comprehensive national review report**



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA  
MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS  
AND COMMUNICATIONS

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## **1. Over the past five years, what have been the most important achievements, challenges and setbacks in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women?**

The reporting period has been marked by significant developments as well as rupture and crises, serving as a litmus test for our society's commitment to gender equality. From 2016 Estonian gender equality policy has been planned and implemented through the Welfare Development Plan which was the first time that gender equality had a governmental level wide-scale national strategy. In 2023, the government adopted a new Welfare Development Plan for 2023-2030, which outlines five sub-goals, including gender equality and equal opportunities. It seeks to achieve gender equality by enhancing economic equality, increasing women's participation in decision-making processes, transforming societal attitudes, and strengthening institutional capacities to promote gender equality. The working programmes of the strategy are being updated every year in order to ensure and monitor the effective implementation of the strategy.

Twenty years ago, the Gender Equality Act came to force as progressive legislation. Currently, a draft law is being prepared to merge the Gender Equality Act and the Equal Treatment Act and revise the regulation. The new law will widen the scope of protection and the grounds of protection to a similar level as is for gender with the current legislation. For example, disabled people will receive protection against discrimination in all areas of social life, as the ground of disability is currently only protected against discrimination in employment.

The new law will also expand the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner's competencies. Additionally, it will specify the duties on gender mainstreaming for the education sphere, employers, and policymakers. That being said, systematic gender mainstreaming remains a challenge. Although efforts have been and are made to enhance the institutional capabilities and motivation.

There have been several important regulatory changes during the reporting period. The legal age for sexual activities as well as marriage has been raised. Since 2024, the marriage is between two persons regardless of gender.

In March 2024, the Government decided that crimes against sexual self-determination (including rape) shall be fully aligned with the standards of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention. This means that Estonia is moving towards the introduction of a consent-based definition of rape and sexual violence. The planned legal amendments will be accompanied by awareness-raising campaigns and training sessions for practitioners. The legislative draft is expected to be sent to Parliament in early 2025.

There have also been significant developments regarding support systems provided for

families and parents. From 2018 till 2022 several changes were made in the parental leave system to make it more flexible. Initial data indicates that the share of fathers taking shared parental leave in 2023 reached an all-time high of 19%, and 91% of fathers utilized paternity leave. Additionally, the percentage of parents (both mothers and fathers) working during parental leave has increased.

In Estonia, addressing the childcare gap has been a priority. While the law stipulates that there should be no gap between paid parental leave and securing a kindergarten placement, parents often face challenges in obtaining a placement when needed. The new early childhood education law is expected to pass the parliamentary readings in 2024. This legislation aims to enhance the accessibility of kindergarten placements, enabling parents to secure a placement with two months' notice, thereby transforming the nonexistent childcare gap into a reality.

In the coming years, the Ministry of Social Affairs plans to conduct a comprehensive analysis and propose recommendations regarding the effectiveness and purposefulness of family benefits and parental benefits.

Concerning support for families caring for elders, in July 2023, long-term care reform came into effect. Local governments now contribute to the payment of nursing home fees. The principle is that standardized care should be accessible with the care recipient's income and average old-age pension. The shortfall is covered by local government. As part of this reform, additional financial resources are allocated to local governments. Increasing public funding allows for improving the salaries and working conditions of care workers. The minimum requirements were also established for general care services as well as home care services.

One of the areas where gender inequality manifests in a particularly severe manner is gender-based violence. Throughout the reporting period, significant regulatory and strategic milestones were achieved. The Violence Prevention Agreement for 2021-2025 was officially endorsed by the Government in 2021. Subsequently, in 2023, four ministers signed the Prevention Agreement on Domestic Violence 2024-2027, accompanied by an action plan outlining objectives and measures. The agreement delineates two primary objectives: firstly, the recognition and condemnation of domestic violence, and secondly, the provision of systematic and needs-based assistance to individuals affected by such violence. The action plan details specific measures to be undertaken by four ministries: the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and Research.

In 2023, the new Victim Support Act came into force, expanding the range of victim support services and the scope of individuals who receive support. For the first time, principles for the treatment of victims and educational requirements for specialists

working with victims were introduced. With the new law, psychological help, and support for victims of domestic and sexual violence recovering from trauma will become more accessible, without the prerequisite of initiating criminal proceedings. Additionally, the legislation clarifies the roles of institutions and organizes data exchange to enhance system integrity.

Now, let's delve into the topic of employment. In 2023, the gender pay gap in Estonia reached an all-time low of 13.1%. While still high, this represents a significant decrease of more than 10 percentage points compared to the last decade. It's noteworthy that the gender employment gap in Estonia is very low, standing at 1.5% in 2023.

Various efforts are taken and underway to address the gender pay gap. Several research and nudging projects were completed aiming to decrease the still unexplained part of the gender pay gap, reduce gender segregation, and to design and pilot evidence-based policy scenarios.

In 2024, a digital tool, which was initially piloted in a research project, Pay Mirror was introduced, allowing employers to monitor the gender pay gap and other gender equality indicators within their organizations using administrative data. This tool enables quarterly monitoring of the gender pay gap situation without administrative burden, aiming to raise employers' awareness and strengthen their role in reducing the gender pay gap. This is done also to prepare for new pay transparency measures, that will be implemented 2026 when EU's Pay Transparency Directive is transposed. Already in 2018, the Government approved and sent to the Parliament a draft amendment aimed at increasing pay transparency. Unfortunately, due to expiry of the mandate of the Parliament in February 2019, the draft was dropped from the proceedings.

Various measures are also being implemented to tackle horizontal and vertical segregation. Since 2023, we are implementing a range of initiatives supported by European Structural Funds, with the primary goal of diminishing gender stereotypes and fostering gender balance in sectors marked by notable segregation, such as STEM and ICT, as well as education, health, and welfare.

Several crises have occurred during the reporting period or are currently ongoing. In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Varied measures targeting social protection, labour market, and economic, fiscal and business support have been taken to mitigate the effect. A study on the pandemic's socio-economic impact on gender equality was carried out by the Praxis Centre for Policy Studies funded by Estonian Research Council. The focus group and expert interviews conducted in spring 2021 gave an indication for it to be likely that, like in many other countries, the pandemic has affected gender inequality in Estonia, primarily due to the difficulty of reconciling work and family life, which hit women harder than men. Expert interviews also indicated that although the importance of the gender perspective in the development of "pandemic

policies” might be recognised in principle, there were room for improvement when it comes to effectively and systematically applying gender mainstreaming principles to policymaking.

While Estonian women, like women everywhere, experienced an added burden due to the mitigation measures of the pandemic, it's important to note some positive outcomes. The pandemic underscored the critical importance of healthcare, education, and care sectors, where most workers are women. This heightened awareness translated into improved pay levels and contributed to the successful implementation of care reform.

The lessons learned from crisis preparation were tragically highlighted when, on February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale war against Ukraine. This act of aggression has resulted in significant suffering, with 40% of the Ukrainian population, primarily women and children, in dire need of urgent humanitarian aid. Russia has employed tactics of sexual and physical violence, exploitation, and abuse against innocent civilians as a war tactic.

In response, Estonia has spared no effort in providing comprehensive support to Ukraine. Estonia has extended political, economic, and military assistance, ensuring crucial humanitarian aid and initiating reconstruction efforts focused on civilian sites and infrastructure. These efforts include projects such as rebuilding kindergartens and family homes for orphaned children as well as supporting internally displaced women in making career choices and starting businesses.

Ukrainian citizens and their family members who fled Ukraine have been granted temporary protection in Estonia. As recipients of this protection, war refugees are entitled to receive subsistence benefits, family benefits, social benefits, as well as access to labour market services and support, on par with other individuals living in Estonia. Since February 2022, over 50,000 Ukrainian refugees have sought temporary protection in Estonia, constituting approximately 4% of our population.

Currently, Estonia is home to nearly 40,000 Ukrainian war refugees, all under temporary protection with temporary residence permits. Among them, 35% are younger than 21 years old, and approximately 70% are women. Notably, 57% of Ukrainian refugees aged 20-64 who are under temporary protection are employed (among women 56% and among men 64%).

To aid Ukrainian refugees, Estonia has implemented a wide range of support initiatives, projects, and services, coordinated by both the state, private sector, and NGOs. These efforts include mentorship programs, entrepreneurship initiatives tailored for women, as well as support services offered in the Ukrainian language by government agencies, covering areas such as education, employment, and social and psychological support.



**2. Over the past five years, what have been the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/or programmes?**

To promote gender equality the top priorities of the Estonian Government have been:

- Eliminating violence against women and girls:
  - More information regarding this is provided under questions 15-17.
- Promoting and protecting right to work and rights at work:
  - More information regarding this is provided under questions six and 13.
- Unpaid care and domestic work / work-family conciliation:
  - More information regarding this is provided under question seven.
- Digital and financial inclusion for women:
  - More information regarding this is provided under questions eight and 13.
- Changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes:
  - More information regarding this is provided under questions eight and 13.

**3. Over the past five years, what specific actions have you taken to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls?**

In recent years, starting from 2022, there have been many efforts to support and integrate Ukrainian refugees. This report does not provide a comprehensive overview of the actions, but some examples are given under questions 12 and 29.

There have been several substantial positive developments regarding the rights of LGBT+ people. Effective from January 1, 2024, same-sex couples can get married in Estonia. This landmark legislation grants, for the first time, same-sex couples the right to joint adoption.

Major progress has also been made in advancing the Registered Partnership Act. Although the law was initially adopted in 2014, its full implementation was hindered due to the absence of implementation acts. However, as of January 1, 2024, these implementation acts will come into force, ensuring the comprehensive application of the rights outlined in the law.

Since 2022, Estonia has been funding a medical expert committee for transgender people from the universal healthcare budget. Estonia is aware of the long waiting times for the medical expert committee. The state is currently working on expanding the committee into two different committees. With this, we are planning to expedite access to the medical and legal transitions that depend on the decision of the committee.

In 2023, the Ministry of Social Affairs funded the publication of the Guide to Hormone Therapy for Gender Transition. In 2024, the Ministry of Social Affairs co-funded an e-course for healthcare workers on LGBTIQ health. The aim of the course is to provide an overview of the special needs of LGBTIQ people in the health sector.

Estonia is currently in the process of drafting its first LGBT+ action plan, with completion expected by the end of 2024.

A bill has been submitted to Parliament aimed at amending the Penal Code to enhance the enforceability of hate speech prohibition. Currently, prosecuting individuals for incitement to hatred is challenging, as it necessitates a direct threat to people's lives or health. The proposed legislation also introduces hate crime provisions into our legal framework. The Ministry of Social Affairs has asked Parliament to add gender identity as one of the listed protected categories in the law. This would make the protections based on the law explicitly applicable to trans people.

Estonia is actively working on amendments to the Equality Treatment Act to strengthen our anti-discrimination laws. The objective is to equalize the treatment of characteristics protected by the law.

Notably, since 2023, our parliamentarians have established the first-ever parliamentary support group for the LGBT+ cause.

**4. Over the past five years, how has the confluence of different crises affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what measures have you taken to prevent their negative impact on progress for women and girls?**

Several measures have been taken to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the first wave of COVID-19, salary subsidies were paid from March to June 2020 to employees whose employers' activities were significantly impacted by the pandemic. This measure directly benefited 17,500 institutions and 137,500 people. Notably, 50% of the employees who received the salary subsidy worked in wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, or accommodation and food service activities—sectors predominantly employing women. Despite this support, the Praxis Centre for Policy Studies found that while the measure helped prevent increasing inequalities, both the measure and the crisis itself had a greater impact on relative poverty among men.

During the lockdowns, local governments were required to ensure childcare for frontline workers. However, during the first wave of the pandemic, other parents were strongly advised not to take their children to daycare or kindergarten unless absolutely necessary. All schools, except those for students with learning disabilities, were

closed, and distance learning was implemented. This closure placed an even greater burden on parents of children with special needs. To address this, a temporary special proactive allowance was provided to offer replacement income for parents who had to be temporarily absent from work due to caregiving responsibilities.

From the fall of 2020, national policy aimed to avoid closing schools and implementing distance learning as much as possible, favouring regional or school-based decisions instead. Guidelines emphasized the need to continue in-person learning for children with learning disabilities.

From December 2021 to January 2022, the sixth Gender Equality Monitor, a representative population survey mapping gender equality-related experiences and attitudes, was conducted. The survey included questions about how COVID-19-related restrictions affected the sharing of unpaid work and care duties between women and men in Estonian families. According to the survey, 47% of respondents did not experience any change in the distribution of chores, a share that was similar among men and women. Among men, 54% believed that the added chores were shared equally between partners, a view less commonly shared by women (41%). Additionally, 11% of men claimed that their partners did the added chores, whereas 31% of women stated that they carried the burden of the added chores.

Unlike some other countries, Estonia did not see an increase in reports of domestic violence during the restrictions; rather, a small decrease was noted initially. This decrease is likely related to the difficulty of making such reports when victims and perpetrators were in close proximity due to the restrictions. Additionally, only slightly more than 10% of such reports are made by someone other than the victim. Extra steps were taken to guarantee support for victims of gender-based and domestic violence, as well as for specialists working in shelters. In response to COVID-19 restrictions, efforts were made to provide help to victims through hotlines and web-based solutions. Continuation of services was prioritized: shelters received personal protective equipment, witnesses were encouraged to report incidents, and a helpline was opened for perpetrators. Additional resources were also allocated from the state budget to finance victim support and psychosocial crisis aid services.

**5. Over the next five years, what are the priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/or programmes?**

The priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls are set in the national gender equality strategy, that is part of the Welfare Development Plan for 2023-2030, adopted by the government in 2023. The Welfare Development Plan outlines the main challenges and opportunities as well as courses of action for advancing gender equality

and equal opportunities. The overall goal set in the strategy, is for women and men to have equal rights, duties, opportunities and responsibilities in all areas of social life.

The Welfare Development Plan takes into account the targets set in the country's long-term development strategy 'Estonia 2035', international commitments, including the CEDAW convention, as well as the global sustainable development goals (incl gender equality and reduced inequalities) of the UN.

Gender equality is an underlying principle in the Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030. It states that gender equality and equal opportunities are consistently taken into account in policy-making and the development of measures in all areas, and specific targeted measures are implemented as needed to reduce inequalities. The indicators for measurement of the overall advancement of welfare include gender equality index.

The more specific strategic goals for gender equality outlined in the Welfare Development Plan encompass: increasing economic equality between men and women, increasing gender balance in decision-making processes, changing societal attitudes to value and support gender equality, strengthening institutional capacities to promote gender equality, enhancing sectoral law enforcement, and increasing cooperation with stakeholders and CSO-s and ensuring well-functioning advocacy. The development plan is implemented through four-year rolling programmes. Progress on the development plan's implementation is reported annually as part of the national budget performance reporting process.

The English translation of the Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030 can be found here: [Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030.pdf \(sm.ee\)](#)

## **6. Over the past five years, what actions has your country taken to advance gender equality in the world of work (including informal and non-standard employment as well as entrepreneurship)?**

From January 2019 to 2022 research project [REGE](#) – “Reducing the Gender Wage Gap” was carried out with an aim to decrease the still unexplained part of the gender pay gap by clearing up further reasons for it through linking together different existing databases, adding qualitative analysis, and using simulation and prognosis models to design evidence-based policy scenarios.

By linking together different existing databases, research was able to explain a significantly larger portion of the gender pay gap—40% compared to the previous 15%. Individual-level characteristics, such as education level, labour market status, age, and nationality, account for only a marginal share of the pay gap. In contrast, the average salary paid by the employer and the proportion of women employed by the employer play a more substantial role. Occupation and sector of economic activity are moderately important in explaining the gap.

The results also show that in the lowest income quintile, men earn approximately 5% more than women, and almost the entire pay gap can be explained, primarily by individual characteristics (age, nationality, education, mother tongue) and employer characteristics. For medium-wage earners, only half of the pay gap could be explained by these factors, and for high-wage earners, only a fraction of the gap could be explained.

The project also gave policy recommendations, one being to increase the pay transparency and for the state to monitor the gender pay gap. The strong recommendation to increase pay transparency was also given by OECD in report [“The Economic Case for More Gender Equality in Estonia”](#).

By June 2026, Estonia will transpose the EU pay transparency directive, clarifying rules on pay transparency for both employees and employers. From 2026, Estonian employers must establish pay structures to ensure non-discrimination and transparency, evaluating all positions based on gender-neutral criteria. To assist employers in meeting these requirements, the state will provide training sessions, online courses, and guidelines on gender-neutral job evaluation.

Starting in 2026, applicants must receive information about pay or pay ranges before interviews. Upon request, employers must provide employees with information about the average pay level and gender pay gap for employees doing the same work or work of equal value. Employers with 100 or more employees will face monitoring and reporting requirements, and gender pay gap indicators will be disclosed to employees, the Labour Inspectorate, and the public.

To support the employers regarding the monitoring the pay gap, a digital tool called Pay Mirror was introduced in 2024. More information is provided under question 38.

Additionally, a draft law is being prepared to transpose the EU directive aimed at increasing gender balance among board members of listed companies. To promote balance in the management bodies of equity issuers, the general meeting of the equity issuer must choose between two possible objectives derived from the directive: either at least 40% of the members of the supervisory board must be of the underrepresented gender, or at least 33% of the members of both the management board and the supervisory board must be of the underrepresented gender. Equity issuers should achieve the chosen objective by 30 June 2026. If an equity issuer does not meet the set objectives by the deadline, it must apply transparent and non-discriminatory selection criteria when electing members to the management bodies.

The draft also includes a temporary positive action measure: if candidates for a position in the management body are equally qualified, preference must be given to the candidate of the underrepresented gender. Equity issuers are required to provide

information on the chosen objective and its fulfillment to the Financial Supervision Authority. These measures are temporary, as both the directive and the provisions transposing it will expire on 31 December 2038.

In addition to the updates arising from the directive, amendments will be made to the State Assets Act to increase gender balance on the boards of state-owned companies. The amendments stipulate that the nomination committee, formed to propose members for the supervisory boards of companies with state participation, must consider the state's gender balance objectives and requirements. Specifically, in supervisory boards with three members, at least one-third must be of the underrepresented gender, and in supervisory boards with four or more members, at least two-fifths. This objective must be achieved by 30 June 2026, the same deadline as the gender balance objectives derived from the directive.

The proportion of women on the boards of publicly listed companies in Estonia is among the lowest in the EU. The Estonian labour market is characterized by vertical segregation, with a significant gender gap in leadership positions. This trend is also evident, though to a lesser extent, among lower-level managers. Women's representation at the top of corporate hierarchies in Estonia has remained consistently low. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, the proportion of women on the boards of major publicly listed companies in Estonia has grown by only 3 percentage points over the past decade (from 7% in 2013 to 10% in 2023). However, gender differences are smaller at lower management levels in Estonia. Women also have a high level of education: among those aged 25-64, 52.7% of women and 33.7% of men have higher education; 26.4% of Estonian women have a master's degree compared to just 16.3% of men. This suggests that Estonia has a pool of qualified women who could be included in leadership positions.

Table: Share of women in managerial positions

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Female managers	37,4	41,1	40,2	34,4

Source: Estonian Statistics

**7. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, promote work-life and family balance and strengthen the rights of paid care workers?**

Significant developments have been made in the support systems for families and parents. Between 2018 and 2022, several changes were implemented in the parental leave system to make it more flexible for sharing between parents and to better reconcile work and family life.

The purpose of parental benefit is to support the reconciliation of work and family life by providing parents with substitute income while raising a child under the age of three. The parental benefit for the mother and the father are individual rights. Shared parental benefit is a right shared between parents, allowing them to decide which parent will receive the benefit and to divide it flexibly.

Under the new system, there are 100 days of maternity leave, 30 days of paternity leave, and 475 days of shared parental leave. Parental and shared parental leave can be used until the child is three years old. The changes allow both parents to be on leave and/or receive parental benefit for up to 60 days together. When parents use this option concurrently, the overall period is proportionally reduced by the days used together. Additionally, according to the law amendments, parents may stop and restart receiving the benefit daily until the child turns three years old. This enables both parents to share caregiving responsibilities and work part-time. The maternity leave period is shortened from 140 days to 100 days, allowing for a longer period of paternity leave and shared benefit.

The benefit is paid regardless of the parents' working status, with the minimum amount based on the current minimum wage. The benefit rate is determined by the previous income level, with the maximum benefit set at three times the average salary of the year before last. Furthermore, the flexibility in using parental leave and benefits also supports employment during shared parental leave. The parental benefit is reduced only when the monthly income exceeds 1.5 times the Estonian average salary.

Initial data indicates that the share of fathers taking shared parental leave in 2023 reached an all-time high of 19%, up from 8% in 2017. The number and percentage of fathers among recipients of parental benefit have doubled.

The reform has more than doubled the percentage of parents who work while receiving a benefit. Before the amendment, about one-tenth of benefit recipients earned income from work in a calendar month. Since March 2018, the percentage of recipients earning income from work has increased, amounting to 24% of all recipients of parental benefit in September 2023.

The employment rate of men does not seem to be significantly affected by the age of the child, but for women, this factor is important. Comparing 2018 and 2022, the employment rate for women with children aged 0–2 increased from 44% to 66%. Consequently, the employment gap between men and women decreased from 44% to 28% over these years. These changes have positively impacted women's participation in the labour market.

In 2021 the Ministry of Social Affairs prepared a bill to change the Social Welfare Act and Family Law Act, which entered into force in the second quarter of 2022. These changes laid foundation for the organisation of long-term care and greater support for

people with care burden and are following:

- defining long-term care in legislation for the first time;
- local government has to prefer home care services to institutional services;
- local government is obliged to identify/asses the need for support for a person with a care burden;
- second-degree relatives are no longer required to provide maintenance.

In 2021, the Ministry of Social Affairs initiated amendments to the Employment Contracts Act and related laws to enhance support for employees and officials with caregiving responsibilities. These amendments grant the right to apply for flexible working conditions, such as part-time work, flexible hours, and teleworking.

Additionally, the amendments provide extra protection for caregivers in the event of termination or dismissal and introduce a reversal of the burden of proof in disputes concerning termination or dismissal.

In April 2022, the Ministry of Social Affairs drafted legislative intent focusing on three main areas:

- Expanding eligibility criteria for care leave, originally implemented in 2018, to allow more individuals to benefit.
- Enhancing the employment participation of informal caregivers by improving the balance between work, caregiving responsibilities, and family life, along with better social guarantees for caregivers.
- Proposing measures to reduce out-of-pocket payments for 24-hour general care services under the Care Reform initiative.

One of these proposed changes has already taken effect. From July 2023, local governments are funding care costs from care home fees, covering expenses related to care workers, assistant care workers, work attire, health checks, and training. The principle is that standardized care should be accessible within the care recipient's income and the average old-age pension, with any shortfall covered by local government.

Increased public funding aims to improve the salaries and working conditions of care workers, including raising wages and recruiting additional staff to address labour shortages. To enhance service quality, more detailed minimum requirements for general care services were established, effective from July 1, 2023, regarding service content and staff-to-client ratios (effective from July 1, 2026). These measures limit staff workload and enable a more personalized approach to clients. Additionally, new minimum requirements for home care services will take effect on January 1, 2025, allowing municipalities sufficient time to align their services with the new standards.

As part of the care reform, the state invested 40 million euros in 2023. This included 0.3



million euros annually for the Social Insurance Board to enhance service quality supervision, and 39.2 million euros for municipalities to fund 24-hour general care services under updated conditions and improve access to long-term care. In 2024, state funding for local municipalities' revenue base and equalization fund increased to nearly 61 million euros. This funding provides local governments with the flexibility to organize long-term care in their areas effectively. The allocation of funds is based on the proportion of elderly residents (aged 65+) in each municipality, as the need for care increases with age. The funding will increase yearly in line with income tax revenues and is expected to reach 76.6 million euros by 2028.

To support the implementation of the care reform, a wide range of support measures is provided for local municipalities to improve home- and community-based services and support informal caregivers, with special attention to region-specific needs.

### **8. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce the gender digital divide?**

Estonia has implemented a variety of initiatives to close the gender digital divide, including information and communication campaigns, research projects, nudging projects, training programs, and hobby education initiatives. One notable project is "Choose IT!", which partners with Estonian IT companies to enable postgraduates to retrain as software developers. Below are two specific examples of these initiatives: one for children and the other for a retraining program.

The HK Unicorn Squad is a movement that provides hobby technology education exclusively for girls, aiming to foster genuine interest in engineering, robotics, and natural sciences among girls aged 8-14 through practical assignments. Founded in 2018 by entrepreneur and engineer Taavi Kotka, the initiative began with 17 girls aged 8-12. Following a successful initial course, test groups were expanded across Estonia in spring 2019, offering free educational kits with teaching resources and instructions. The movement has since reached nearly 4,000 girls, establishing girls-only study groups in every county of Estonia.

The mission is to increase girls' interest in technology, robotics, and science from an early age, aiming to balance gender representation in technology-related hobby groups. Estonia, like many countries, faces significant gender disparities in ICT fields, with women comprising less than 25% of specialists according to Eurostat data. HK Unicorn Squad strives to reduce girls' apprehensions about technology and empower them with equal opportunities in the tech sector.

Through its activities, the initiative aims to explore why boys outnumber girls in technology fields and seeks to inspire girls' interest in tech careers. Experience from HK

Unicorn Squad indicates that girls are equally curious but often feel excluded in mixed-gender settings, missing out on positive experiences that boys enjoy. This disparity persists into the job market, where high-paying ICT roles remain inaccessible to women. The imbalance highlights systemic issues in education and societal attitudes. The initiative's experience shows that girls thrive when exploring technology in girls-only groups, fostering openness, enjoyment, and comfort. By boosting confidence and interest in tech, it aims to level the playing field in future job opportunities.

From 2023 to 2029, HK Unicorn Squad's initiatives are supported by the European Social Fund's project "Directing students' study options in vocational and higher education – Engineering Academy and IT Academy." The movement emphasizes inclusivity and environmental sustainability by providing all necessary resources for classes in recyclable boxes, facilitating weekly deliveries and exchanges among groups.

Another example is the training programs provided by [Smartwork Academy](#). Since 2021, the organisation has offered free training opportunities for women to start IT careers.

The first Work In Tech program in 2021 helped over 100 women start IT careers, with over 85% securing jobs, further education, or internships in IT. The program was supported by Google.org, and INCO. In 2022, the Work In Tech program helped nearly 200 women start careers in IT, specializing in IT support, UX design, data analysis, and IT project management, and was supported by Google.org and INCO. Additionally, another 50 women were able to acquire skills for roles in data analysis, UX design, and IT project management supported by Telia, Google.org, and INCO in the "Women in Tech | Telia" program.

In 2023, the Work In Tech program helped 300 women start careers in IT, specializing in IT support, UX design, data analysis, cyber security, python, and IT project management, and was supported by Google.org and INCO. Additionally, another 50 women were able to acquire skills for roles in data analysis, UX design, cyber security, and IT project management supported by Telia, Google.org, and INCO in the "Women in Tech | Telia" program.

In November 2023, also a Career Day For Women took place in cooperation with Telia. This event provided an overview of six IT-related professions to 100 women on-site and reached over 38,000 online. Experts from leading tech companies and HR professionals offered career change advice. That same year, the Work In Tech program was also launched in Finland - reaching more than 150 women.

Supported by Interreg Central Baltic and in cooperation with Riga Tech Girls, the "Wotech" project will take place in 2023-2024. This project offers free programming

courses to 100 women from Estonia and 100 from Latvia. Participants gain essential IT skills for junior programmer roles (such as Python, Java, and DevOps) and insights into various IT career opportunities.

In 2024 a third year of the “Women In Tech | Telia ” program will take place, providing 50 women the opportunity to specialize in IT Support, cyber security, data analytics, and UX. And, for the second time, a Career Day for women, with the potential to reach over 40,000 women online and 100 women on-site, will be organized with support from Telia.

Also, in cooperation with TalTech and Telia, Smartwork Academy will launch a series of podcasts for women who are interested in a career in the tech field. “Techcast” for women will start in August 2024 and will have 10 episodes focusing on different roles in IT and introducing inspiring women who have pivoted their careers to Tech.

In 2024, the Estonian Association for Personnel Management PARE awarded Smartwork Academy and Telia for proactive efforts in involving women in the technology sector and promoting gender equality with the project 'Women in Tech | Telia'.

**9. In the past five years, how has the macroeconomic and fiscal policy environment affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what macroeconomic policies has your country implemented in support of a more gender-equal economy?**

There is no specific gender-based budgeting method implemented in Estonia, neither has there been any analysis on austerity measures’ gender impact.

Direct funding designated to gender equality and equal treatment can be monitored through programmes. Gender equality policies are part of the Welfare Development Program and more specifically subgoal 5 “gender equality and equal opportunities”. See the table below for the budget estimations 2021-2025. That being said, as gender equality is one of the goals of national strategy Estonia 2035, other programs are also contributing.

Table: Funding of gender equality and equal treatment programme (\*only gender equality for 2021 and 2022)

2021*	2022*	2023	2024	2025
1 945 284	1 395 851	2 290 000	2 924 000	2 508 000

**10. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?**

Main provider of active labour market measures in Estonia is Estonian Unemployment

Insurance Fund (EUIF) as Public Employment Services (PES). Measures provided are not gender specific, but provision of a labour market measures are decided taking into account the person's profession, work experience and needs of the person and the right of the person to work and freely choose their work. Also, there are taken into account the needs of the employer and the right of the employer to freely choose their labour force, also the purpose of the labour market measure, the situation on the labour market, including the balance between labour demand and supply and regional characteristics.

Important part of the active labour market policies in Estonia are skills policies. Training and retraining measures form almost half of the active labour market measures budget in Estonia. From 2020 to 2023, the inflow into active labour market measures was between 183 and 220 thousand (number of participation times, not unique persons) each year. Of this inflow, around 20% constituted career information provision for young people and 15% career counselling. Additionally, 22% of the inflow consisted of various skills support measures (labour market training, formal study allowance, training grants for employers to reimburse employees' training costs, support for obtaining qualifications, and work practice). 55% of the inflow in the skills support measures were women and 45% were men. Although the training measures provided by EUIF are not gender specific, it is taken into account that the measures wouldn't feed into segregation and person's opportunities at the labour market are considered as widely as possible.

There has been one specific open call of projects in February 2024 of active labour market measures directed to the activities which aim is to increase the employability of women and support them in getting and staying in work. These projects are just in the starting phase of implementation.

Since 2016, the Youth Guarantee support system has been in operation, which allows Estonian local governments to receive information twice a year on children and young people aged 16–18(26) who are not studying or working and may need additional support. Based on the information received, the local government can proactively provide support. The Youth Guarantee support system has been part of the Estonian Youth Guarantee Estonia Action Plan since 2022. At the moment, the 13th monitoring has started. According to the analyses, while there is similar prevalence of NEET (not in education, employment, or training) among young men and women, then one of the risk factors of falling into NEET status is also becoming a young mother.

Specific case management under the Youth Guarantee Action Plan is ensured through a number of areas of action, where youth-centred support is provided depending on the domain. Based on the proactive case management approach, the child/young person's need for assistance is assessed first and, where appropriate, they are then supported in accordance with networking principles. In order to ensure that basic needs are

covered, cooperation will take place with the social departments of local governments.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications will allocate €12 million for the development of the Estonia-wide Youth Guarantee support system and case management in the period of 2023–2029. The development work in the current period is based on the national co-creation process, on the basis of which a cooperation model for providing services and support to youth in a NEET situation or at risk of NEET was prepared for local authorities. The framework created will allow for a harmonised understanding of how to reach and support children and young people.

The National Action Plan for Strengthening the Youth Guarantee 2022–2027, coordinated by the Ministries of Economic Affairs and Communications, and Education and Research, aims to reduce social exclusion among young people, prevent them from dropping out of the labour market or education system, and ensure their swift return if they become NEET. It focuses on two main areas: supporting NEET youth through personalized assistance and implementing universal preventive measures for all young people, with special attention to those at higher risk of exclusion.

In 2023, the Ministry of Education and Research approved support measures through the program “Youth work measures to support the entry of young people into the labour market and support measures for NEET youth,” and initiated preparatory activities.

The plan promotes mobile youth work in regions with high NEET rates, supports voluntary activities, and emphasizes continued education for those with basic or lower education levels. Development programs will enhance the training of professionals working with NEET youth. Support activities include providing necessary materials, training, and monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of the action plan.

### **11. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve access to social protection for women and girls?**

In recent years the welfare of families with children has deservedly lot of attention. Here is a small description of the situation and examples of different measures.

Absolute poverty indicates the percentage of people in the society who are unable to support themselves. There was a dramatical increase in absolute poverty in 2022 (see the table below). The absolute poverty rate among children under the age of 18 rose from 1.3% in 2021 to 4% in 2022 and among the working-age population from 1.9% in 2021 to 4.1% in 2022. Regarding households with children, absolute poverty increased the most in single-parent households (90% of whom are women): from 4.2% in 2021 to 12.7% in 2022, but also in households of couples with three or more dependent children: from 1.9% in 2020 to 4.3% in 2022. The increase in the percentage of families in absolute poverty was due to the increase in the cost of living. A higher risk of poverty

occurs in families with fewer income earners compared to dependants, such as single-parent families and families with many children.

Table: Absolute poverty rate of families with children, 2017-2022

		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Absolute poverty rate, %	Adult and child(ren)	7,8	4,6	5,3	6,1	4,2	12,7
	Couple with one child	.	.	1,5	1,1	.	.
	Couple with two children	2,8	1,6	2,8	2,6	1,2	2,2
	Couple with three or more children	2,3	1,6	3,0	1,9	.	4,3
Absolute poverty rate before social transfers, excl. pensions, %	Adult and child(ren)	22,9	23,9	21,3	20,8	13,8	23,0
	Couple with one child	3,5	5,6	4,3	4,7	3,7	4,3
	Couple with two children	6,9	8,1	6,8	6,8	3,9	6,8
	Couple with three or more children	15,5	12,8	16,0	13,4	9,1	14,8

Source: Statistics Estonia

Significant progress has also been made in supporting children and families where the child is raised by one parent or where responsibilities of raising the child is divided between parents unequally. As of 1 January 2022, the minimum monthly child maintenance payment is no longer tied to the minimum wage. Instead, it is determined based on the needs of the child, the financial capability of the parents, family allowances provided by the state, and the number of children entitled to receive maintenance from the same person. Additionally, the base amount is adjusted annually according to changes in the consumer price index.

Parents can also calculate the minimum sum themselves using a web application created by the Ministry of Justice. This application helps estimate the amount of child maintenance that a court would likely establish for their family. The application (in English) can be found here: [Child support calculator \(just.ee\)](https://just.ee/child-support-calculator).

At the end of 2023, an analysis of the implementation of the changes was completed at the request of the Ministry of Justice (available [here](#)).

Several changes have been made during the reporting period to enhance the enforcement of child maintenance claims. As of January first, 2021, if a maintenance debtor has not voluntarily handed over a vehicle or other property registered in the Motor Register against which a note prohibiting disposition has been recorded in that

register, the enforcement agent may, if this is necessary, enlist the assistance of a police officer to take control of such a vehicle or other property which is in the direct possession of the debtor. Also as of January first, 2021, where, under a statute or a regulation, a person has to be identified before a monetary obligation owed to them is performed, and where performance of such an obligation is to be made in cash and its amount exceeds 5000 euros, the person subject to the duty to identify must, as a preliminary matter, establish whether they are dealing with a maintenance debtor. If this is the case, the person subject to the duty to identify refuses to perform their obligation to the maintenance debtor and, without delay, notifies an enforcement agent who is conducting enforcement proceedings on the maintenance claim of the debtor. The enforcement agent may then attach the corresponding claim.

Starting from 2022, the state is partially financing those maintenance enforcement cases where the enforcement agent fails to obtain the funds to finance the proceedings (in the form of enforcement proceedings fees collected from the debtor). The change is expected to have a positive effect on enforcement of maintenance, because the enforcement agent no longer must finance unprofitable proceedings himself and can direct funds to better organize his activities and enforce a child's claims for periodic maintenance more effectively. Since 2016, several restrictions have been in place for parents who fail to fulfill their obligation to provide maintenance for their children. In addition to the indefinite suspension of various rights and licenses, from 2022, a court may, by order, revoke the documents, such as passport, of the debtor, and restrain the issue of such documents for up to two years.

As of January first, 2023, the Code of Enforcement Procedure provides that where the enforceable title contains a child's claims for periodic maintenance, which fall due in the future, the party seeking enforcement states whether they wish such claims to be included in the enforcement proceedings. The amendment substantially specifies the right of the claimant of child's periodic maintenance to subject the further payments of child's periodic maintenance to the constant control of the enforcement agent if the person who is obligated to pay maintenance does not do it voluntarily. The obligation to ensure the timely enforcement of each subsequent alimony payment when it becomes due (when the due date for payment arrives) remains the main obligation of the enforcement agent. A child's claims for periodic maintenance could have been enforced in similar way before, but the new regulation significantly reduces legal disputes related to the admissibility of maintenance enforcement. It is possible to submit a child's claims for periodic maintenance for enforcement if even one month of payment delay occurs.

As of 1 January 2024, the maintenance allowance (temporary state assistance introduced in 2017) paid to children whose parents do not comply with their maintenance obligations was doubled.

In 2023, the single-parent child allowance was increased to €80 instead of the earlier €18.19. In addition, a legislative intent was prepared with an aim to transfer the survivor's pension under the scope of the Family Benefits Act. The amount of the current survivor's pension depends on the old-age pension of the deceased parent, varies to a very large extent (from €8 to €2,000) depending on deceased parent's pension or number of family members and does not provide sufficient economic support to all children who have lost a primary income earner, but after the planned amendment in 2026, all children who have lost a primary income earner will begin to receive a uniform indexed allowance, which covers at least half of the child's maintenance costs. This would allow families who have lost a primary income earner to receive a uniform indexed allowance based on the child's maintenance costs and help prevent the risk of poverty. The proposed law modernizes financial compensation for loss of a provider. A new support scheme ensures adequate support for children who lose a parent. Widows or the deceased's parents are another group eligible for survivor's pensions. Widows must choose between their own pension or half of their deceased spouse's pension, rarely benefiting due to similar pension amounts between genders in Estonia. Widows unable to support themselves are covered by other social schemes.

The new law introduces support for unemployed pregnant widows, allowing them to receive parental benefits two months before the child's birth. The Family Benefits Act will include a new benefit for children who lose a parent, paid until age 19, or 21 if studying. This support compensates for the cost of raising a child, regardless of the deceased parent's pension or number of family members. The amount will be standardized, indexed to maintain its real value over time.

Implementing this law will improve the welfare of children who lose a parent by providing uniform compensation regardless of the deceased parent's work history, ensuring their daily needs are met.

The coping capacity of families with children has also been supported by changes in family allowances. For example, in 2023, the child allowance for the first and second child was increased from €60 to €80. Allowances paid to large families have also increased during the reporting period. Starting from 2024, a large family (starting from the third child) will be paid €450 to €650 per month, depending on the number of children. Temporarily, family allowances for large families were even higher in 2023 but were made more proportional in 2024.

Allowances increase the sense of security of parents and help families cope better, but child poverty is mainly influenced by parents' labour market status and household composition. In recent years the parental leave system has gone through changes as described under question seven. The other side of work and family reconciliation is care, as the care reform is described under question seven, then the early childhood



education is also soon gone under change. Early childhood education is organised by local authorities and the monthly fee may differ across different regions of Estonia. The ratio of childcare expenses to parents' income is one of the lowest among OECD countries ([OECD, 2022](#)). The number of children at kindergartens was significantly increased by Ukrainian war refugees: as of 10 November 2022, 1,921 Ukrainian children attended Estonian preschool institutions, ie approximately 3% of all kindergarten children.

There are over 90% of 6-year-olds in preschool in all counties. Yet the attendance rates vary from county to county, especially for children under 3 years of age. This can be attributed to regional income inequality, as the [survey](#) from 2021 revealed that the lower the household income, the more widespread the use of kindergarten. For children aged 3–5 years, the attendance rate in rapidly growing local governments may also be due to the inability to secure kindergarten places for all who request it. While the law stipulates that there should be no gap between paid parental leave and securing a kindergarten placement (available for 1,5-year-olds), parents often face challenges in obtaining a placement when needed.

Currently, Early Childhood Education Law is undergoing parliamentary readings. the purpose of which is to establish a more uniform framework for kindergartens and childcare service providers. The proposed harmonisation of the support system will also contribute to greater coherence between early childhood education and basic education. The amendment also harmonises the requirements for childcare service providers and nurseries and stipulates that local governments must provide all children aged 1.5–3 years with the opportunity to attend childcare and all children aged 3–7 years the opportunity to attend kindergarten. These changes are to enter into force on 1 January 2025. This legislation will enable parents to secure a placement with two months' notice, thereby transforming the non-existent childcare gap into a reality.

## **12. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?**

From 2018, Estonia started providing free HPV vaccine to girls aged 12-14. From February 1st, 2024, all children aged 12–18 in Estonia can now receive the HPV vaccine. This change ensures that all can now be vaccinated against HPV, and the expanded age range allows us to reach previously unvaccinated youths.

In Estonia, more than 300 cases of cancer caused by HPV are diagnosed annually, along with numerous cases of precancerous conditions and genital warts. The estimated cost of treating HPV-related diseases is 6.8 million euros per year, with 81% of that being the cost of cancer treatment. HPV affects both men and women, causing a variety of health problems. By vaccinating boys, we not only protect their health but also help reduce the overall spread of the virus in the population. Herd immunity

development has been demonstrated with HPV vaccination; the more people are vaccinated, the harder it is for the virus to spread, providing community-wide protection. A meta-analysis by Brisson et al. concluded that eliminating HPV16/18/6/11 viruses is possible if HPV vaccine coverage for both girls and boys reaches 80%.

The cost-effectiveness of gender-neutral HPV vaccination was demonstrated in a health technology evaluation report by Orumaa M., Lutsar K., Alloja J., et al. from the University of Tartu. The report concluded that vaccinating 12-year-old girls and boys with bi- or nonavalent vaccines would prevent 24% to 27% of HPV-related cancers. The incremental cost-effectiveness ratio of vaccination with the nonavalent vaccine was estimated at 15,099 € per quality-adjusted life-year.

The HPV vaccination course for 12–18-year-olds consists of one dose. A single dose of the HPV vaccine provides long-term protection against HPV infection and the cancers it causes. Vaccination is generally carried out at school, but in justified cases, HPV vaccination can be done at a family doctor's center by agreement with the family doctor. Information about all immunization schedule vaccinations can be found at the official website, [www.vaktsineeri.ee](http://www.vaktsineeri.ee). The Estonian Health Board, with the help of the PERCH project (Partnership to Contrast HPV), has renewed its HPV communication campaign, and more information can be found here: <https://vaktsineeri.ee/et/hpv>.

The change in HPV vaccination has been positive. Previously, there were an average of 10,000 HPV injections per year. Since the start of 2024, the number of vaccinations has doubled, reaching over 19,000 doses.

The reporting period was significantly influenced by two major crises: the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The latter has resulted in over 50,000 Ukrainian refugees, primarily women, seeking refuge in Estonia. Under question 14, we have detailed the measures implemented to address the pandemic's impact on mental health. Followingly, we outline the specific measures taken to support the mental health of Ukrainian refugees.

In 2022 the Ministry of Social Affairs in cooperation with WHO conducted an initial mapping of competences, resources and capacities of mental health and psychosocial support and service providers in Estonia. The conclusion was that assistance was provided, but primarily on a reactive basis. In addition to psychosocial crisis support, helplines and online advice offered by the Estonian National Social Insurance Board, the Ministry of Social Affairs activated a network of pastoral care workers in March 2022 to offer psychosocial support to Ukrainian refugees. During first 6 months there were about 2000 pastoral care counselling sessions every month. The opened application rounds for local governments, described under question 14, to offer psychological counselling and mental health services were available to both locals and refugees. Nevertheless, an additional package of mental health services specifically for refugees

was prepared to respond to the increased demand for services.

In October 2022 the first refugee specific community-based small support measure was opened for four months in total amount of 30 000 EU. Based on the experience gained from the first small support measure and the outcome of the initial mapping, the second, more comprehensive measure for nine months in total amount of 830 000 EUR was opened in April 2023. The funding was focused on providing mental health services to war refugees in Estonia, or supporting activities that improve their welfare and sense of security, rational decision-making and behaviour, in order to support their integration and adaptation in Estonia.

The aim of the support measure was to encourage a supportive environment in which the refugees would be as healthy as possible, socially and professionally active, as well as having a positive attitude both towards Estonians and their compatriots - and where their children would be well supported. At least 8,000 people were reached by these services. Including 2,080 people who got access to research-based mental health support digital applications, adapted specifically for the target group. Web-based services were supported on the condition that at least 50% of their services were either based on or enabled by human contact. At least 6,200 meetings in different forms were held - 4 community support centres (in Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu) were active. Other examples of psychosocial support measures provided by the grant were groups for mothers and children and play classes and play-based learning activities for children. Other examples of mental health services provided were individual psychological counselling, group counselling for children and adults, family counselling and creative therapy.

Supported services improved the general welfare and mental health among the target group. The skills, knowledge and competences were transferred to their families and communities. Providing mental health services enabled addressing problems that prevented specific individuals from functioning successfully in society including the labour market. Community-based interventions had a very significant impact on the psychosocial wellbeing within the target group: various health and welfare indicators were improved, severe emotional states were significantly alleviated, an emotional stabilisation took place, participants' trust in Estonia and Estonians grew and improved. The impact of supported interventions on the psychosocial welfare of children included improved mental resilience, academic performance and behavior at school and organisations' work with non-native children eased the work of schools and kindergartens.

As a general principle, mental health services for refugees are offered on the same principles as for locals, with the main entry point to services being primary health care. The specific measures were taken for a certain period to respond to the increased demand for services and to help integrate refugees into Estonian society. It is also

important to note that not all problems are refugee status specific. Although some of the problems intensified as a result of the difficult situation, individuals would have faced them while remaining in their home country as well.

**13. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, including in sectors where they are underrepresented?**

Firstly, it is important to note the transition to education Estonian-language education, that will contribute to tackle the inequalities between Estonian and Russian speaking children and future adults (regarding the gender pay gap, while salaries of Russian speaking women and men are generally lower than those of Estonians, and Russian speaking women's have particularly low salaries.

The aim of the transition to Estonian-language education is to give all Estonian children, regardless of their native language, the opportunity to acquire a high-quality education in the Estonian language. The transition of all Estonian schools and kindergartens to Estonian as the language of instruction will be beneficial to children and young people, as Estonian-language education helps them to integrate into the Estonian cultural and value space, so that they do not lose their identity, but expand their options. A common Estonian-language educational setting will give all children and young people better opportunities for further learning and finding a desirable job and activity in the future. Education in the Estonian language supports the development of Estonian national identity, increases the cohesion of society and reduces both educational and socio-economic segregation.

In addition, the results of the OECD PISA study show that Estonia offers the best Russian-language education in the world, but it lags behind Estonian-language education by about one academic year on average. There is also a lack of modern Russian-language educational materials, and teachers for schools with Russian as the language of instruction have not been trained in Estonia for several decades.

The transition to Estonian-language education will begin in kindergartens and grades 1 and 4 in 2024 and will continue until 2030. To achieve this, additional resources have been allocated to increase the volume of Estonian-language instruction at all levels of education and to ensure the availability of educators with the required proficiency in the Estonian language.

In 2023, the Ministry of Education and Research in Estonia updated the national curricula for primary and secondary schools, which were last revised in 2014. The new curricula would have taken effect in the fall of 2023, with schools required to align their programs by September 1, 2024. The updated curricula aimed to provide more elective courses in high school and emphasized developing students' general competencies.

The updates aimed to make education more learner-centered and better aligned with societal and labour market developments.

Another important change in renewed curricula regards the technology subject (technology: manual training, handicraft and home economics, technology studies). Previously the curricula stated that students were able to choose between activities, usually they were divided followingly: traditionally male activities such as woodwork and metalwork, and traditionally female activities such as cooking, sewing and knitting. For practical reasons, this training is organised by dividing the class into two groups of similar sizes. This requirement led to a composition of group by gender, and further entrenchment of gender stereotypes: girls sort into cooking, sewing, and knitting, while boys sort into woodwork and metalwork. With the new curricula all students have to take part in all the different activities.

Furthermore, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications is implementing various activities during 2023-2029 to combat gender stereotypes and reduce gender segregation in education and the labour market, with a special focus on STEM and EHW sectors as well as women in leadership. These activities encompass conducting research, providing training, executing awareness raising campaigns, and endorsing non-traditional career paths. Additionally, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications plans to facilitate collaboration through open calls, to support employers, educational institutions, as well as other key stakeholders in helping to prevent and reduce gender segregation in education and labour market.

One of the ongoing activities is developing a gender equality training programme for career counselors working in Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund to help combat gender stereotypes, encourage non-stereotypical career paths and reduce gender segregation in the labour market. The training programme will be a part of the in-job training program for career counselors. The Unemployment Insurance Fund's career counselors provide career counseling for adult clients as well as pupils in grades 7-12 all over Estonia.

Total budget for the activities targeted to reduce gender segregation in education and labor market is 3,5 mln euros, co funded by European Social Fund.

**14. What actions has your country taken to ensure that economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic closes gender gaps in poverty, employment, social protection, education, and/or health that the pandemic has exacerbated?**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, mental health became a significant concern in Estonia. At the same time Estonia lacked a dedicated mental health policymaking unit.

However, a mental health chapter in the National Health Plan 2020-2030 and the Green Book on Mental Health was about to be finalised, both activities led by the Public Health Department. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Minister of Social Protection initiated the Mental Health Task Force which brought together policymakers from different sectors (health, education, social affairs, criminal justice, scientists, NGOs, and start-ups). The Task Force gathered weekly from March to June 2021 and monthly during the second half of the year. As a following step to the task force, a Mental Health Department was established in the Ministry of Social Affairs within the health sector at the beginning of 2022. By the end of the first working year, a Mental Health Action Plan 2023-2026 was presented as a result of cocreational work done with a comprehensive list of stakeholders in the field.

One of the first activities of the Task Force included a survey among the local governments on supporting mental health on a local level. In the context of the coronavirus epidemic, where a negative impact on people's mental health was expected, but the local governments were not obligated to offer their residents mental health services, the survey focused on people's mental health needs in the crises, the existing organisation of the services on a local level, and the expectations and needs of the local governments to support the mental health of the people most in need.

Through the regional crisis committees, 75 out of 79 local governments gave their answers to the questionnaire. The results indicated that local governments felt the growth in the mental health-related needs of their people, especially among families, parents, and children. Conflicts and violations within families, alcohol consumption, and problems related to distance learning were mentioned as the main problems. Local governments described their response (offering services, e.g., prevention, treatment) mainly as a case-by-case problem-solving. The results also showed that local governments expect their role in the mental health services pyramid to be clarified and access to counselling services (e.g., psychological counselling, family therapy, peer support groups, etc.) to improve. The idea of introducing the subsidy scheme for hiring and offering salary support for a local psychologist-counsellor resulted from discussions when introducing the results of the survey.

As the next step, in September 2021, two subsidy schemes were launched to foster non-clinical mental health support on a local level for a pilot period of four months. The first scheme was a salary and supervision subsidy (9) for hiring a non-clinical psychologist ("community psychologist") to work for the local community. Community psychologists are ideally qualified or alternatively in the process of qualifying as the psychological counsellor, whose job is to prevent MH problems from arising or from developing and promote mental well-being and self-realisation. The second scheme, the mental health service subsidy, was for buying a wide range of non-clinical mental health services from the service market, e.g., family therapy, peer support groups, art

therapies, pastoral care, etc. After the pilot period, it was clear that the subsidy measures had been successfully received by the local governments.

In 2022, the two subsidy schemes were offered with a budget of 1,3 million Euros. 41 out of 79 local governments across Estonia (52%) have used these measures, with the mental health service subsidy being more popular than the salary subsidy for a community psychologist. However, as of 2022, the budget was still partially underused, despite the continuous positive feedback from the local governments that these measures are deemed critical, and despite many efforts put into introducing these measures, consulting the local governments, and giving continuous feedback and suggestions on the implementation process. One of the reasons for not applying for the subsidy given by the local governments was that there was no specialist with appropriate competencies and allocated working time for doing this job.

By 2023, the subsidy measures received wider interest, and within two months, 32 local governments applied for the schemes and booked the entire budget for the year. Overall, it has taken about 1,5 years for the local governments to adapt to the change and offer various non-clinical mental health services in the community apart from services provided nationally.

The grant application rounds were a temporary solution that will be replaced with a more permanent funding scheme. For this from 2025, the funding from the application rounds will be directed to the support fund for local governments. This change will allow local governments to independently and flexibly organize mental health services, ensuring better accessibility of these services for local residents without having to submit applications. The additional funding to the support fund is planned to be approximately 1.7 million euros in 2025, with the support amount ranging from 7,000 to 111,000 euros per municipality. Over the next three years, the total size of the fund will be approximately 5.2 million euros.

**15. Over the past five years, which forms of gender-based violence, and in which specific contexts or settings, has your country prioritized for action?**

The Governmental Strategy for preventing violence is based on Preventing Violence in 2015-2020 and [Violence Prevention Agreement 2021-2025](#). The Strategy's implementation is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice. The Violence Prevention Agreement covers the prevention and combating of various forms of interpersonal violence including violence against children, domestic violence, youth violence, gender-based violence, trafficking in human beings, sexual violence, physical and mental violence, violence against the elderly, cyber violence and hate crimes. In comparison with the previous strategy, new topics are violence against the elderly and mental violence.

The agreement sets out 14 measures for violence prevention. The agreement does not include a complete list of violence prevention activities. The focus is on problems that still need more attention or have so far been overshadowed or where the expected progress has not been made. The agreement does not include a complete list of violence prevention activities, but the focus is on problems that still need more attention or have so far been overshadowed or where the expected progress has not been made compared to earlier strategies. Measures or directions of work are as follows: 1. Attitudes and norms condemning violence and awareness of violence; 2. Prevention of violence in educational institutions, youth work and hobby education and activities; 3. Supporting children and young people who have problems with violence; 4. Prevention and reduction of domestic violence; 5. Recognizing and preventing violence against the elderly; 6. Violence prevention in the digital world; 7. Prevention of human trafficking; 8. Prevention of sexual violence; 9. Specialists' awareness of violence and intervention skills; 10. Victim-friendly procedure; 11. Better protection and support for victims of violence; 12. Supporting non-violence; 13. A stronger role for health and social care providers in preventing violence; 14. Investigating the impact of violence prevention policies.

Violence affects many people in Estonia. In 2020, violent crimes accounted for almost a third of all registered crimes, and every other violent crime was domestic violence (the statistics on reported domestic violence cases below). Women and men have different experiences of violence. Men are exposed to violence mainly in public places (e.g. on the street), women mostly at home.

Table: Number of crimes of domestic violence, 2016-2021

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of crimes of domestic violence	4119	3987	3760	3244	3186

Source: Ministry of Justice, Kriminaalpoliitika.ee

The problem of violence is becoming more and more widely recognized in Estonia. A recent study by the Social Insurance Board (SKA) in Estonia reveals significant improvements in public awareness of domestic violence and human trafficking over the past decade. In 2023, the Ministry of the Interior ordered a study on the attitudes of emergency responders and police officers dealing with domestic violence cases. The results indicated some problems regarding the attitudes and skills of the first responders dealing with violent incidents.

The Ministry of Justice coordinates the implementation of the agreement through the



Violence Prevention Steering Group, to which responsible authorities have appointed their representatives, and more broadly through the violence prevention network, which includes partners engaged in violence prevention from NGOs, representative organizations, educational and healthcare institutions, and elsewhere. The implementation of the agreement is monitored annually by the Government.

In 2023, four ministers signed the Prevention Agreement on Domestic Violence 2024-2027, accompanied by an action plan outlining objectives and measures. The agreement delineates two primary objectives: firstly, the recognition and condemnation of domestic violence, and secondly, the provision of systematic and needs-based assistance to individuals affected by such violence. The action plan details specific measures to be undertaken by four ministries: the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and Research.

To tackle the occurrence of domestic violence following goals and areas in need of development have been put down: 1) systematic development of the knowledge and anti-violence attitudes of children and young people; 2) there are intervention methods that are used to prevent violent relationships, throughout lifespan, which are effective and impactful, and supporting the development of social skills ; 3) services directed at victims and perpetrators of domestic violence are based on social development and are need-based and sustainable; 5) the handling of domestic violence crimes is victim-centered and trauma-informed, avoiding re-victimization.

The actions laid down to enhance the recognition and condemnation of domestic violence are: 1) Improving trauma-informed work practices and training and continuing education of specialists on the topic of domestic violence; 2) implement recognizing children in need within the education system (intervention guide or system); 3) communication plan for domestic violence. To provide more systematic and needs-based assistance to those affected by domestic violence, the action plan includes the following activities: 1) Developing services and improving their accessibility for perpetrators; 2) Ensuring (high-risk) victims' safety and protection; 3) Implementing new victim support legislation; 4) Ensuring compensation for crime victims.

The Estonian Internal Security Development Plan 2020–2030 includes two measures/actions related to violence:

1) a measure for violence prevention and reducing the risk of violence. Within this measure, there are sub-measures aimed at creating a unified family violence prevention awareness plan to increase awareness, including sub-measures for preventing child sexual exploitation, especially online.

2) a measure aimed at protecting victims of violence. Under this measure, sub-activities are planned to train the Estonian police on violence issues, dealing with victims, and better recognition of domestic violence. Measures are also taken to enhance the

capacity for investigating cases of sexual abuse online, applying restorative justice, etc.

### **16. In the past five years, what actions has your country prioritized to address gender-based violence?**

In 2023, the new Victim Support Law came into force, introducing for the first-time principles for the treatment of victims, educational requirements for specialists working with victims, and specifying, among other things, the supplementation of the list of services and principles for providing services to victims of human trafficking. With the new law, psychological help and support for victims of domestic and sexual violence recovering from trauma will become more accessible, and the prerequisite for receiving psychological help will no longer be tied to the initiation of criminal proceedings. To enhance the integrity of the system, legal grounds were established for the exchange of information to ensure victim support.

Under the new law, victim support services are: 1) basic victim support service; 2) psychosocial support in the event of crisis; 3) women's support centre service; 4) sexual violence crisis support; 5) service for victims in human trafficking; 6) restorative justice services; 7) support for abandonment of violence; 8) mental health assistance in support of recovery from trauma. These services are state funded.

Additionally, Social Insurance Board, which is responsible for organising victim support, is responsible for: 1) organisation of victim support services; 2) organisation of payment of compensations; 3) maintaining the 24-hour victim support hotline 116 006; 4) organisation of in-service victim support training; 5) involvement and guidance of victim support volunteers; 6) organisation of prevention and information activities.

The new law defines the principles of victim treatment to create the best possible conditions for supporting each person in need. Important keywords are 'victim-centered', 'inclusion', 'informing about rights and opportunities for assistance', 'comprehensiveness of need', and 'accessibility of aid'. A human rights-based victim-centered approach requires dignified treatment of the victim during both initial assistance and criminal proceedings, understanding the reasons behind the victim's behavior and choices, a supportive attitude towards the victim, and the provision of quick and multifaceted assistance to prevent re-victimization and unequal treatment.

Since practice illustrated that the number of compensation recipients has been modest considering the prevalence of violent crimes, therefore the process of applying for compensation for victims of crime became clearer. A victim who has suffered serious health damage as a result of a violent crime and has incurred financial loss due to decreased income or additional expenses related to health recovery is entitled to compensation. In the event of the victim's death, compensation is paid to dependents.

To support trauma recovery and to facilitate the psychosocial recovery of victims of

crime and violence and to reduce the likelihood or intensity of psychological and behavioral disorders in victims, victims of domestic and sexual violence can receive mental health support for trauma recovery (services of psychologists, psychotherapists) without criminal proceedings, whereas previously, initiating proceedings was a requirement. Additionally, the new law also specifies the list of individuals entitled to receive mental health support for trauma recovery if they have a need for assistance related to the incident. A broader circle of the victim's close ones or relatives can receive support: the victim's children, grandchildren, parents, and other persons raising the child, grandparents, siblings, persons married to or in a permanent relationship with the victim.

Data exchange between institutions was established to provide victims with better access to services. For the first time, data exchange on cases of high-risk domestic violence and informing the Social Insurance Board (SKA) about victims requiring special treatment and protection was regulated to offer assistance proactively.

One of the services now regulated by law is network cooperation for high-risk domestic violence. Estonia uses the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) network cooperation model developed in the United Kingdom, to quickly and effectively assist people at high risk of losing their lives or suffering serious health injuries due to domestic violence, as well as the minor children growing up in these families. The service was developed with the help of European Social Funds but is now provided from the state budget.

The goal of MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is to prevent the most severe consequences of domestic violence. This includes preventing homicides, suicides, and serious health injuries resulting from domestic violence, as well as preventing and reducing the intergenerational trauma of severe domestic violence.

The MARAC model is based on the principle that high-risk domestic violence cases cannot be resolved by separate agencies but only through well-functioning network cooperation, utilizing a shared information space and the capabilities and services of different agencies. MARAC involves identifying and assessing the risks of domestic violence to victims using the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, and Honour-Based Violence) risk assessment tool, creating and implementing an intervention plan through network cooperation, conducting network case management meetings, sharing information and responsibility, and evaluating outcomes. Additionally, a MARAC volunteer supports the victim.

Since 2019, each county in Estonia has a core MARAC team based on the principles of the MARAC model, which includes victim support, police, local government, women's support center, prosecution, child protection, and increasingly, representatives from the medical field. There are 18 MARAC core teams in Estonia.

In 2023 [study](#) was conducted to assess the impact of MARAC on domestic violence victims, specialists, and support networks in Estonia. In the period from 2019-2022 MARAC model was used 498 cases. According to the study in MARAC cases, the victims are predominantly women (95.8%) aged 35-50 (42.6%), with minor children in their households (72.3%). However, monitoring data shows that the profile of victims varies, and high-risk domestic violence also includes younger and older individuals, those without minor children, and male victims.

### **17. In the past five years, what strategies has your country used to prevent gender-based violence?**

There have been broad variety of initiatives both by the state, NGOs and private sector to increase awareness about gender-based violence. Some initiatives by Social Insurance Board:

- In 2021, Social Insurance Board conducted a campaign targeting survivors of sexual violence, encouraging them to seek help, even if the incidents occurred in the past (<https://vimeo.com/694366423>). In 2021-2023 there were also state-funded support groups for survivors of the sexual violence. The support groups are now provided in the local level.
- In 2024 campaign "[Notice. Intervene. Help.](#)" against sexual harassment in nightlife. The main focus of the campaign was on bystanders and perpetrators. The campaign was spread nationwide through social media, print, and television, with a focus on outdoor media and internal campaigns in nightlife establishments in Tallinn, including staff training. A guide for nightlife establishments was created, along with mini-training sessions. Police, sexual educators, nightlife managers, and other influencers were involved in discussions on Instagram, Facebook, various programs, and newspapers on the same topics. The campaign continues in other Estonian cities with vibrant nightlife. Information sessions were held for network partners on sexual violence and available support options – police, victim support workers, women's shelters. Information session and specific training was provided for Night Managers ([Ööhaldjad](#)) – volunteers for harm reduction in nightlife, dedicated to making nightlife safer for everyone.

A recent study by the Social Insurance Board (SKA) in Estonia reveals significant improvements in public awareness of domestic violence and human trafficking over the past decade. Conducted among Estonian residents aged 15 and older, the survey aimed to map awareness and attitudes towards gender-based violence and human trafficking, comparing results with similar studies from 2014 and 2016.

Key findings include:

- Recognition of domestic violence has significantly increased. By 2024, approximately 80% or more of the population identifies various abusive situations as violence, compared to around 50% in earlier studies.
- Attitudes towards domestic violence victims have become more supportive, with 38% seeing the victim accountable in 2024, down from about 50% previously. The belief that domestic violence is a private matter has dropped from 22% in 2014 to 10% in 2024.
- Awareness and support for victims of sexual violence have improved, although victim-blaming persists. In 2024, 38% still believe women provoke rape through their clothing, down from 47% in 2014.
- Public knowledge of support services for victims has also grown, with 92% aware of at least one support organization, most commonly women's shelters (78%) and the Social Insurance Board's victim support (55%).

Besides the public attitudes, special attention is given to professionals' skills, attitudes and behaviours. For example, the Social Insurance Board has developed various e-courses: 1) Resolving domestic violence cases, 2) Practices considering psychological trauma, 3) Providing psychological first aid to individuals in crisis. These courses aim to offer resources to specialists as well as the general public.

In 2023, the Ministry of the Interior ordered a study on the attitudes of emergency responders and police officers dealing with domestic violence cases. The results of the study are an important input for further developing the awareness and skills of first responders dealing with violent incidents. Based on the results of the study, several recommendations were made, for example training for emergency responders and police officers on domestic violence:

- Systematically and consistently organize training on domestic violence for emergency responders and police officers;
- Pay specific attention to raising awareness among emergency responders and police officers about psychological violence, how to respond to it, and potential interventions.

Following the study, the Ministry of the Interior made a working group comprising the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Social Insurance Board, the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, the Emergency Response Centre, and the Police and Border Guard Board. The working group began working towards implementing the recommendations outlined in the study. The domestic violence training mentioned above is currently being organized, and updated training programs are expected to be available in the near future.

In the future, the goal is to regularly train 60 police officers and emergency dispatchers annually as part of continuing education. Specialists who have completed this training

will have a better understanding of cases of domestic violence, enabling them to be more empathetic and supportive.

In addition to paying attention to the victims, there is wider discussion – and reasonably so – that perpetrators must take responsibility for their behaviour and take steps to stop the violent behaviour themselves. Social Insurance Board (in close cooperation with the Police and Border Guard Board and the Prosecutor's Office) decided in 2020 to pilot proactive counseling for individuals who have acted violently towards their loved ones. The pilot has now transformed into a state-funded service that is regulated in Victim Support Act.

Accessing the counselors is free of charge, and the first contact can be made via phone or email. During the conversation, the counselor conducts an initial risk and needs assessment and plans further interventions (e.g., recommending support groups, addiction treatment, or individual psychological counseling). If necessary, the coordinator will provide long-term support to the individual including face-to-face counseling sessions. Coordinators exchange information with the cooperation network, most frequently with victim support workers, to get a comprehensive picture of the family's needs and plan the best intervention to prevent violence. In planning the substantive work, the support line has taken inspiration from the UK, Norway, and has collaborated with the WWP European Network.

In 2020, two coordinators were working on the support line, providing initial psychosocial support for abandonment of violence, by 2024 the team consists of six members. While the service can be freely accessed, then there can also be a referral from the Prosecutor's Office. In 2022, 875 counseling hours and in 2023 1,440 counseling hours were provided for individuals who were referred by the Prosecutor's Office.

In 2024 (six months), there were a total of 1,182 appeals to Support for Abandonment of Violence service counsellors, a total of 534 people were counselled. One counselling session is about one hour. About 80% of cases come from the police and prosecutors. In 2024, 307 individuals have been referred by the Prosecutor's Office and 115 individuals were referred by the Police. Counseling takes place face-to-face, in 95% of cases. Because of new data collection method in 2024, it's not possible to compare the service reach with 2022 and 2023. Contacting the service is free, i.e. the perpetrator of violence, his loved one, the victim, a specialist can ask for advice and support, but mainly work is done with perpetrator of domestic violence (83% clients). Average clients are men (86%), who is 36-45 years old (39%), married/in a relationship (60%), who has committed physical violence (90%) against his current partner/spouse (43%; plus, ex-partners 25%) for the first time (62%), and he needs help with social skills (84%).

The Ministry of Justice plans to amend the prohibition of stay section of the Law Enforcement Act. The current law allows for a prohibition of stay for only 12 hours which can be extended with the authorization of a prefect or the head of the other law enforcement agency. The latter can be unreasonable restriction. One of the aims of this change is to help victims of domestic violence, including children, break free from the cycle of violence and ensure the best protection and security for the victim. Since a large portion of domestic violence incidents occur on weekends, extending the prohibition of stay would result in better access to social services for the victim (including psychological and social counseling), as most of these services are available on weekdays. Very few services essential for such cases are available on weekends.

In 2022-2023, the prohibition of stay was imposed on average 450 times. The prohibition of stay is applied mostly in cases where criminal proceedings are not initiated (84%). These are mainly situations where it is not possible to identify the elements of a crime on-site, and the Police and Border Guard Board needs time to gather evidence. This period also allows the victim (including those who have witnessed the violence, mostly children) to begin receiving necessary help, such as establishing initial contacts with counselors.

**18. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (e.g. online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images)?**

Due to amendments to the Estonian Media Services Act that came into force in 2022, the responsibility for promoting media literacy falls within the framework of state education policy planning and related areas organized by the Ministry of Education and Research. In collaboration with the Government Office and the national media literacy network, a national action plan for promoting media literacy is nearing completion this year. This plan is based on the principle that the development of people's information and media literacy should be systematically supported throughout their entire lifespan.

So far, the emphasis in promoting media literacy has primarily been on education, specifically informing different target groups on how to safely navigate the internet, including social media. Here are some programs that the state is implementing in collaboration with non-profit organizations addressing social media usage and its associated harmful effects:

- Youth Information Portal Teeviit is a nationwide youth information service aimed at providing young people aged 7-26 with high-quality and reliable information that they can use to make choices and decisions related to their lives. There is a separate category for covering media literacy topics, including cybersecurity and cyber harassment: <https://www.teeviit.ee/category/meediapadevus>

- Project "Smartly on the Internet" (<https://www.targaltinternetis.ee/en/>) aims to promote smarter use of the internet by children and their parents and prevent the online distribution of child sexual abuse material. The project is co-financed 50% by the Estonian Government (the Ministry of Social Affairs) and 50% by the European Commission. The project involves: training sessions and seminars for children, parents, teachers, and social workers, as well as awareness-raising events for the general public; the creation of training and awareness-raising materials for children, teachers, and parents; creative competitions for children and students. Teachers and interested parties have compiled materials for schools that primarily help students understand the information war in cyberspace, how to deal with it, and how to distinguish true information from false. There are also materials and a lesson plan for covering cyber harassment: <https://www.targaltinternetis.ee/opetajatele/kuberkiusamine/>
- Back to School NGO offers e-lessons for schools. They provide (also live) video lessons with lesson plans for teachers to provide quality teaching materials. There are more than 500 lessons provided so far. With the support of donations and projects, the creation of e-guest lessons continues. On average, 25 classes or 625 students from grades 1 to 12 watch one e-lesson live. Media literacy themed guest lessons are available in both Estonian and Russian and are covering also cyber security and hygiene topics.

In addition, the public authorities collaborate with ICT companies to promote safe behavior on the Internet. There are a series of initiatives taken by or in collaboration with ICT companies:

- Greatest Courage – campaign and website created by largest mobile operator Telia with resources for children, parents and teachers on preventing, detecting and stopping cyber bullying, also where to get help (<https://www.suurimjulgus.ee/>).
- Cyber Needle, Cyber Nut, Cyber Drill, Cyber Pin – a series of annual web-based contests for schools and students of different age on digital safety and cyber security. The content has been created by digital safety and cybersecurity experts.
- A cyber security game SPOOFY for children created by CGI Estonia (<https://www.spooify.ee/en>)

Furthermore, Estonia has web-constables – police officers that work on the Internet. The first one started working in 2011, but in recent years the number of web-constables has increased, and the unit now consists of 13 people. They respond to notifications and letters submitted by people via the internet and train children as well as adults on Internet security. They mostly patrol and are actively present on Facebook, X, and in local social media portals as well as in forums. Their presence not only helps and



assists individuals and raises awareness, but also has a preventive effect.

**19. In the past five years, what measures has your country taken to resource women's organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV?**

Violence prevention has always been done in cooperation with the state and civil society. The Violence Prevention Agreement 2021-2025 is implemented in cooperation with NGOs. Services for victims of violence against women are offered by the national victim support service, organized by the Social Insurance Board. A service specifically designed for this target group is the women's support center service, which is financed by the state through a tender (1.07 million euros per year in 2024). Women's support centers are located in all 15 counties of Estonia, providing psychosocial assistance, legal and psychological support, and accommodation for women and their accompanying children.

The strategic partnership to implement Welfare Development Plan funds also women's organizations working to tackle gender-based violence. More on that measure is described under question 35.

During the years 2020-2023 several projects financed by 2 EEA and Norway Grants open calls were carried out. The biggest project was financed through the Norway Grants open call for proposals „Awareness raising activities on domestic violence and to discourage the demand for commercial sex“. Project promoter NGO Lifeline (Eluliin) with its partners were granted 200 000 euros to carry out a project that activities in the period of 2021-2022 resulted in raising people's awareness of domestic violence (through media campaign called “[Sõnavägi](#)” aka “Power of the Word”) and prostitution (separate media campaign called “Mõttele õige peaga” aka “Think With the Right Head”) and the human trafficking that is associated with it. Campaigns outreach activities used both traditional and ambient media, in addition to online and social media, as well as campaign related events. In addition, also short videos were created for children and young people on the topic of domestic violence, which address different aspects of domestic violence and make viewers think about and discuss domestic and gender-based violence.

Between 2021 and 2023, three projects funded by the EEA Grants' small grant scheme, which is supported by Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, focused on domestic violence and sex buyer programs.

Two projects were awarded grants to enhance awareness among Estonian specialists about domestic violence. NGO Vaiter received €59,400, and NGO Pärnu Women Support Centre was granted €57,434. These projects provided training on violence, trauma, drug abuse, and the impact of violence on children, reaching a total of 781 participants.

The third project, funded by NGO Lifeline with a grant of €45,416, aimed to establish and pilot a program for sex buyers to change their attitudes and behavior. A total of 12 sex buyers participated in and completed the program. As part of this initiative, a comprehensive handbook was developed, detailing the theoretical, methodological, and visual materials necessary for implementing the program in the future.

These projects collectively contribute to improving the response to domestic violence and changing behaviors related to sex buying, with the potential for ongoing impact through the resources and programs developed.

**20. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media?**

In 2019-2020, the think tank Praxis implemented a project “Nudging Women to Power”, financed from the European Commission’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, with a co-financing from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the National Foundation of Civil Society and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The general objective of the project was to improve women’s access to high-level political decision-making. This project helped to increase knowledge, awareness and understanding of the importance of gender equality in public policy making and how the media as well as political organisations can help to empower women in achieving higher positions as well as increase their visibility and credibility in public domains. Based on existing literature, experiences of Estonian women politicians, and behavioral insights, recommendations and practical tools were developed to support women's wider participation in politics and high-level decision-making. One of the deliverables of the project was a web page: [Naised Poliitikas](#). This web page provides information and practical recommendations for the media, political parties, and women in politics. The website also features experience stories from top and local-level politicians in Estonia.

In addition, think tank Praxis is currently carrying out two activities regarding the topic. Firstly, at the beginning of 2023, Praxis, along with four partners (Estonian Human Resource Management Association, University of Tartu, and Swedbank Estonia and the Government Office), launched a 2-year project titled "Power of Women Leaders." The goal is to influence the organizational culture in Estonia so that more women can reach and remain in top leadership positions on an equal footing with men. Secondly, a research project, funded by Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, is being carried out that focuses specifically on better understanding of gender stereotypes regarding women politicians. The analysis (carried out in 2024), will look into misogynistic narratives in Estonian public discourse, focusing on media and social media. It aims to map the prevalence and narratives of misogyny, guided by findings from previous research indicating retrogressive attitudes among 15-year-old boys and

low political engagement among girls. The research will analyze misogynistic language in mainstream media and social media, particularly targeting leading women politicians. Expected outcomes include a report with solutions and recommendations, Wikipedia articles, presentations, and educational materials for teachers and youth workers.

**21. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken specifically tailored to address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls?**

Violence Prevention Agreement sets out 14 measures for violence prevention – one of which is preventing violence against the elderly. Planned activities include raising awareness of violence against the elderly, studying its prevalence and risk factors, to ensure the protection of victims, and assessment whether the existing services meet the needs of older people or whether additional services are needed. Solutions for the prevention and intervention of violence against the elderly are to be developed at the local level.

In 2023, 227 elderly individuals, representing 6% of all new cases, turned to victim support services. The main reasons for these visits were psychological and physical violence.

To raise awareness about violence against the elderly, attention is paid to the Day of Elder Abuse through media outreach, as well as through organizing training sessions for professionals. The e-course launched in 2023, 'Resolving Cases of Intimate Partner Violence' aimed to offer resources to specialists as well as the general public also involves materials about violence against elderly as well as other vulnerable groups such as LGBT+.

Several efforts were made by NGOs and other partners. For example, the TOGETHER AWARE project (2021-2022) was implemented by the Pärnu Women's Support Centre, the Women's Support and Information Centre, the NGO For the Protection of Non-Violent Life, and the Icelandic partner organization Róttín. The project aimed to reduce domestic violence in Estonia by training specialists in five major regions. The training raised awareness among professionals about domestic violence, including its causes, consequences, and support options, leading to more effective inter-agency cooperation.

The project produced extensive training materials on intimate partner violence, addiction issues, elder abuse, cyber violence, remote counselling, and cooperation mechanisms. Specialists were also trained to work as joint regional teams. As a result, network members now collaborate to find the best solutions for each person in need,

helping to prevent re-victimization. Other project called MARVOW (Multi-Agency Responses to Violence against Older Women) took place 2020-2022 and was financed by European Commission. Project was carried out by six partners, with the support of nine associate partners in four European countries (University of Tartu and the Women's Support and Information Centre) is a partner from Estonia. The MARVOW project developed and implemented a comprehensive multiagency cooperation model for working with elderly victims of abuse. It did so by bringing together a wide range of stakeholders from relevant sectors of activity (eldercare, healthcare, protection and social services, judiciary and police among others) to identify the gaps that exist within current systems that hinder their ability to adequately serve older victims.

**22. In the past five years, what actions and measures has your country to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making?**

Gender balance in politics has improved, but still remains a challenge. In recent years, Estonian governments have been gender-balanced. In current government, there are 7 men and 7 women. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of women's representation in parliament and among members of local government councils (ca 30% women in both). As of April 2024, 25% of municipal council chairpersons and 19% of city or municipal mayors are women.

Think tank Praxis has carried out several projects aimed at promotion of women's participation in decision-making and politics. More information is given under question 20.

In 2024 to mark the International Day of the Girl in 11th of October the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications in cooperation with Junior Achievement are planning to organize a job shadowing event for girls. The job shadowing initiative aims to break gender stereotypes and support the visibility of girls and women in decision making. The concept of the job shadowing day is to bring together successful and prominent leaders in society from business and politics and girls who are interested in management and leading, to encourage girls take leadership roles and bring media's and the society's attention to the potential of women in leadership and the importance of gender balance in all decision-making levels.

**23. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT)?**

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**24. Please describe your country's current national women's machinery (government entity exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women) and describe the measures that your country taken over the past five years to establish and/or strengthen it.**

In 2020 Equality Policies Department (until 2015, Gender Equality Department) was in Ministry of Social Affairs. From 2023, the Equality Policies Department is in Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication. According to the Government of Republic Act it is responsible for promotion and co-ordination of equal treatment and gender equality and drafting respective legislation. According to the statute of the ministry the department is responsible for planning and coordination of gender equality and equal treatment policy. The department plays a leading role in promoting gender equality and equal treatment, coordinating mainstreaming, and designing measures necessary to prevent and alleviate discrimination.

In 2024 the staff of the Department of Equality Policy consists of 10 positions, 3 of whom are working for the Equality Competence Center of the European Union Cohesion Policy Funds and 1 for implementation of European Social Funds programme. Within the department there is Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Competence Centre for the use of the Cohesion Policy Funding. The Competence Centre provides knowledge-based, effective, and motivating support for promoting gender equality and equal opportunities, to implementers of projects financed from the European Structural and Investment Funds.

Funding allocated to the Department of Equality Policies in the Ministry of Social Affairs to gender equality policy formulation and implementation in 2020 was 1 371 000 euros, in 2024 2 925 000 euros (does not include the funding for the Competence Center).

The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner (hereinafter Commissioner) is an independent and impartial expert who acts independently, monitors compliance with the requirements of Equal Treatment. The team currently consists of 8 members.

The Commissioner is responsible for the use of funding allocated to the Office from the state budget and is entitled to apply for additional funding from e.g. relevant EU programmes. Funding allocated to the Commissioner from the state budget is increasing yearly, being 506,969 in 2020, 507,458 in 2021, 509,870 in 2022, and 514,369 euros for 2023. However, the Commissioner has applied and received funding for various projects, widening its activities and increasing the budget. For example, with additional funds, the Commissioners' budget for 2020 was 791,822 euros and for 2021 902,492 euros.

**25. In the past five years, what other mechanisms and tools has your country used to mainstream gender equality across sectors? (e.g. gender focal points in the Executive, Legislature or Judiciary; inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms; gender audits, consultations with women's organizations)**

One of the mechanisms for advancing gender mainstreaming in Estonia is the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Competence Centre for the use of the Cohesion Policy Funding. In recent years, this centre has gained a prominent role in providing effective support and know-how to policymakers. Established in 2015, the competence centre focuses on gender mainstreaming and adhering to the principle of equal treatment in the use of EU Structural and Investment Funds. One of its main tasks is to provide feedback and counselling during the process of preparing conditions for granting support from the ESI Funds, as well as conducting surveys to analyse the outcomes of gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities activities at the project level. The centre has also created various information materials, including thematic factsheets and guidelines for implementing agencies, intermediate bodies, and users of the funds. Additionally, it organises trainings to support these efforts. Moreover, the centre coordinates the work of an equal opportunities network to promote practical cooperation in gender equality and equal opportunities in the use of ESI Funds.

In 2024, the competence centre launched a [digital tool](#) on their web page to provide concrete support for policymakers in promoting gender equality, equal opportunities, and accessibility in specific fields.

The Virtual Gender Equality Competence Centre ([vordsuskeskus.ee](http://vordsuskeskus.ee)) was developed in 2021 to offer up-to-date information and support to policymakers and other relevant stakeholders, aiding in the better understanding of gender mainstreaming and the promotion of gender equality.

In 2023, online courses were introduced to enhance policymakers' knowledge of gender equality, gender mainstreaming, equal opportunities, and accessibility. These online courses are available in the Digital State Academy environment and are accessible to everyone. Besides e-courses, face-to-face continuation seminars for policymakers from various ministries are being held in 2024. These seminars discuss gender equality and equal opportunities perspectives in different policy areas, such as the environment, digital development, and economic development.

In the coming years, we will place even greater emphasis on training policymakers, promoting collaboration networks to support gender mainstreaming capacity, and developing a national operational model for better implementation of gender mainstreaming in policymaking.

**26. If there is a national human rights institution in your country, what measures has it taken to address violations of women's rights and promote gender equality?**

Chancellor of Justice is a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles, but it does not have a specific gender equality mandate. Nevertheless, in 2022 Chancellor's Office publish the book "Human Rights", which is the first comprehensive Estonian collection on the field of human rights. The book's chief editor is Dr. Liiri Oja, Head of the NHRI at the Chancellor of Justice's Office.

The work consists of 26 chapters, addressing key human rights topics such as the history of human rights, the UN human rights protection system, human rights research methodology, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly and expression, children's rights, the rights of persons with disabilities, violence against women, and sexual and reproductive rights.

The book is available for free on the website [www.inimoigusteraamat.ee](http://www.inimoigusteraamat.ee). In addition to the book, the website features a human rights-themed blog, where shorter posts supporting the book's topics are regularly published. The posts have also covered topics such as menstruation and gender equality, gender-based violence etc.

**27. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?**

Estonia has adopted three National Action Plans for Women, Peace and Security, the last one for the period of 2020-2025. In the end of 2023, a mid-term review of the third NAP was conducted. Early discussions on conducting the fourth National Action Plan have been initiated. Various institutions, ministries and organisations are represented and consulted with for conducting the NAP, as well as its mid-term and final reviews, including the Estonian Defence Forces, Police and Border Guard Board, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Defence, local civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations, the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, and the academia. The NAP 2020-2025 involves domestic and external activities, divided into four categories:

- 1) cooperation, exchange of information, and promotion of the objectives of Resolution 1325 at the international level;
- 2) support for women's human rights and women's empowerment in conflict and postconflict areas;
- 3) increasing sectoral expertise in the field of women, peace, and security in

- agencies and raising awareness in Estonia in general;
- 4) increasing the representation of women in positions related to ensuring peace and security in Estonia, including opportunities to participate in international military and civilian operations.

Full document is available online via

<http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/estonia/>. Additionally, the WPS Agenda is prominently featured in the Estonian Human Rights Diplomacy Bases and Action Plan, available as a pdf file online. Estonia also reports annually on the WPS Humanitarian Action Compact.

**28. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings?**

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Increasing the representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding is one of the priority focus areas of the WPS NAP 2020-2025. Concrete actions include the appointment of advisor for implementing gender perspective in the Estonian Defence Forces, who, among other tasks, coordinates the “Women in Uniform” program, which introduces women the opportunity to join the conscript service and provides information and an opportunity to visit military units in order to get a first-hand experience of conscript service.

Additionally, Estonia has adopted a National Action Plan for our participation in international civilian missions. Increasing the number of female candidates and increasing the overall women’s representation in civilian missions are actions aimed at enhancing Estonia’s participation. More specifically, the goal for updated NAP 2024-2027 is to reach 40% female representation in civilian missions.

Furthermore, gender-responsive approach is an inherent and integral part of humanitarian action and crisis response, which is clearly communicated to partner countries and organisations and is also required from partners in follow-up reporting. Estonia pays attention to choosing partners that particularly focus on gender equality, such as funding the activities of UNFPA in Afghanistan.



**29. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response?**

Here, we'll present a short overview of activities taken in the area of human trafficking, also concerning Ukrainian refugees.

One of the major changes has been the new Victim Support Act, which entered into force in April 2023. The service for victims of human trafficking is one of the eight victim assistance services provided for in the new Victim Support Act. In the old Victim Support Act, it was called victim assistance service, but the content was relatively similar. The purpose of the service for victims of human trafficking, as stipulated in the new Victim Support Act, is to contribute to the victim's sense of security, physical and psychosocial recovery, and to prevent re-victimization. The service for victims of human trafficking includes psychological counseling, psychotherapy, provision of psychosocial assistance, counseling of the victim, provision of legal assistance, accommodation, catering, organization of access to necessary healthcare services, organization of translation services, and assessment of the victim's need for assistance. Compared to the old act, the new act no longer talks about the expected victim, although essentially this target group can continue to be assisted and provided with services. The process involves the Social Insurance Board (or the Labour Inspectorate) identifying the victim using the indicators specified in the guidance material for identifying and assisting victims of human trafficking. In cases of suspected human trafficking, the police or the prosecutor's office is notified. The specified services can be provided to the person for up to 14 calendar days until confirmation is received from the police or the prosecutor's office. If it turns out that the person is not a victim of human trafficking, the Social Insurance Board will stop providing the services intended for victims of human trafficking. This is stipulated in § 24 subsection 4 of the new Victim Support Act.

Additionally, section 25 of the new Victim Support Act supplements the organization of services for victims of human trafficking with special provisions concerning minor victims. There are differences in assisting minor victims of human trafficking. The new act considers the peculiarities of assisting minors and specifies cooperation between victim assistance and child protection.

Citizens of third countries temporarily staying in Estonia are in the risk group in terms of becoming victims of human trafficking. While carrying out various procedural actions and in other contacts (for example, when information is requested from advisors), attention is constantly paid to identifying signs of exploitation. When investigating

cases of smuggling, there is always a parallel focus on whether signs indicating human trafficking appear at the same time. In cases of smuggling, mostly foreigners are already under the influence and control of intermediaries, and the transition to human trafficking can happen very easily.

From 2022, special attention was given to Ukrainians refugees, to ensure they do not get exploited and become victims of human trafficking. For example, in 2022, the focus was on prevention and awareness raising on the helpers and volunteers of Ukrainian refugees. For awareness raising information leaflets were made (in English, Estonian and Russian) and informational videos were done in Estonian and Russian ([link to the videos and leaflets](#)).

The migration advisors of the Police and Border Guard Board have organized 11 information days for employers in three languages in 2023. 7 information days in Estonian, 3 in Russian and 1 in English. As of 2022, 10 seminars for employers have been conducted by migration advisors, 4 of them on the rules of employment of Ukrainian citizens, 3 on changes to the law, 1 for sports clubs and 1 separately for the Union of Hotels and Restaurants. Information days are still held in Estonian, Russian and English. However, it raises awareness among Ukrainian citizens about the rules and requirements so that they know what to observe when starting a job. The seminars in a similar amount were also held in 2022 and 2021.

Attention to Ukrainians was also given to Labour Inspectorate's supervision and counselling activities. Around 20% of supervision specifically covered the inspection of working conditions of war refugees (in 2022). In 2023 the Labour Inspectorate conducted 3,544 supervision procedures, of which Ukrainians were employed in 158 companies. The biggest problem was failure to inform employees about working conditions and entering the correct entries in the employment register, as well as problems related to guidance and training and various violations of work and rest time. In 2023, nearly 800 tips were received (in 2022 721 tips were sent to the Labour Inspectorate and in 2021 this number was 411). Almost 100 of them were related to migrant workers, and 23 tips were also related to Ukrainian workers. One of the latest examples: "the company hires Ukrainians, lets them do a week of "trial days", and then sends them away without paying anything. The employees work illegally, their wages are deducted for minor mistakes."

Joint and separate inspections by the authorities are carried out regularly in the reporting period. During control operations, emphasis is also placed on identifying possible manifestations of human trafficking. Joint inspection visits in cooperation with police, Labour Inspectorate and Tax and Customs Board are carried out according to the proposals of the institutions, and a total of 204 of them took place in 2022, during which 1,576 individuals and 618 legal entities were inspected. In 2023, police

performed a total of 367 inspections, including 73 joint inspections, of which 25 with Tax and Customs Board only, 19 with Labour Inspectorate only, and 29 with Labour Inspectorate and Tax and Customs Board. In 2022-2023, the border and migration control services did not process any human trafficking crimes, but they are constantly dealing with reports coming to them from the Social Insurance Board and elsewhere. The number of human trafficking crimes in 2023 was 14 and in 2022 was 11.

The guideline for identifying and supporting victims of human trafficking was written in 2019, in cooperation with all the relevant counterparts, including state and local bodies and the non-governmental organizations. This guideline is currently being updated.

**30. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls?**

There have been several important regulatory changes during the reporting period regarding the wellbeing of children and adolescent girls. In 2022, amendments to the Penal Code raised the legal age for sexual activities between an adult and a minor from 14 to 16 years of age. The changes in the Act include a so-called "Romeo and Juliet" clause which allows for consensual sexual intercourse between a young adult and a minor aged 14-15 with an age gap of no more than five years. In the same year amendments to the Family Law Act raised the minimum age for marriage from 15 to 18 years of age, aligning it with adulthood. The changes were announced in 2021 after cases of sexual abuse of children in sports were publicized in media and campaign #14poleokei (#14isnotokay) was launched ([campaign description in Estonian and case study video on English](#)).

In 2020 in the cooperation of the Social Insurance Board, the University of Tartu, and the National Institute for Health Development Sensoa flag system was introduced in Estonia by publicizing the materials, training and promotion for the public. The training was provided for specialists working with children but also for specialists working in special care services.

In 2022 the Child Protection Act was amended to regulate the operation and tasks of the Barnahus service (children's houses) in Estonia. Also, the local municipalities' child protection services were obliged to engage the children's house in all cases of (suspected) child sexual abuse. Children's houses are a state service to assist victims of sexual abuse and children with harmful sexual behaviour. The Barnahus model has been implemented in Estonia since 2017 and this has improved the co-operation of various professionals working with child victims as well as the prevention work and raising awareness of child sexual abuse. In 2017 the first Barnahus was opened in Tallinn, 2018 the second one in Tartu and in 2020 the third one in Jõhvi. In 2022, the fourth children's house was opened in Estonia, which ended the first round of

expansion throughout the country.

Table: Number of referrals to Barnahus service

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Referrals	132	241	402	428	534	631	728

Source: Social Insurance Board

The Barnahus service will also be enhanced and, in addition to the development of services targeting sexually abused children, a greater focus will be placed on abusive children. For example, new assessment tools will be introduced in 2024, as well as a handbook for assessing the needs of children and young people exhibiting harmful sexual behaviour, for planning interventions, and for providing assistance. Activities to provide counselling for sexually abusive children will be expanded. The competencies and training needs of professionals who provide psychological assistance and other interventions in cases of child sexual abuse will also be analysed this year in order to ensure that both abused children and children exhibiting abusive behaviours have access to appropriate help.

A draft Act was prepared in the spring of 2024, emphasizing the obligation of key professionals working with children (including teachers, healthcare professionals, coaches, hobby education professionals, etc) to inform child protection services of children who are in need of assistance. When notifying, it is also necessary to provide known data on the child's need for assistance. The draft Act also regulates more broadly the processing of personal data in child protection work. The changes are scheduled to come into effect in 2025, and by that time, supporting tools (forms, guides, e-training) will also be created to help professionals identify and notify of a child's need for assistance. These measures will facilitate notifying a child in need of assistance, including an abused child, and will contribute to a faster exchange of information between various sectors. They also help to raise awareness of child abuse among professionals working with children and promote spotting such children.

In 2024, the Social Insurance Board will begin developing e-learning materials for child protection specialists and professionals working with children, which will provide them with the knowledge and skills to understand and notice the impact of domestic violence, including indirect and psychological abuse, on a child, to support the timely detection of children's need for assistance and their access to help.

**31. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation and land degradation?**

To draw attention to aspects related to equality in the green transition, The Gender

Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner commissioned a [study](#) that analyzed equality-related elements in national green transition documents.

The most important result of the analysis is a set of recommendations on how to enhance the integration of equality into the green reform. These recommendations are based on the experiences of Estonia and other countries, expert opinions, and best practices in integrating equality into the green transition. The authors of the study compiled 11 recommendations across four areas that need to be organized and developed to systematically integrate equality principles into the planning and implementation of green reforms. These areas are strategic approach, empowering stakeholders in the green reform, evidence-based and target-group-centered decision-making and increasing public awareness and inclusion.

The analysis aims to enhance understanding of the links between equality and the green transition while supporting those leading green reforms in implementing equality-focused solutions. Key findings include:

- EU strategies consistently integrate green transition and equality goals, but in Estonia, this integration is inconsistent and often ad hoc.
- experts note the need for simultaneous development of both fields but highlight hindrances such as unclear integration goals, role assignments, lack of shared principles, low awareness and skills, and insufficient resources.
- measures intended for a just transition offer the most support in fostering strong communities and promoting gender equality but least in supporting the well-being of older people and minority groups.

Recommendations to enhance the integration of equality in Estonia's green reform include:

- Establishing a strategic framework with clear goals and roles.
- Empowering stakeholders crucial to green reform and equality mainstreaming.
- Promoting evidence-based, target-group centered decision-making.
- Increasing knowledge and inclusion to foster a positive public attitude.

In summary, while equal opportunities are sometimes considered in Estonia's green transition policies, systematic mainstreaming is often lacking. Prioritizing and centralizing these efforts is essential to maximize the effectiveness of both equality and green transition objectives.

The commissioner's office organized an international conference titled "What Kind of Green Transition is Fair?" where politicians and opinion leaders discussed the impacts of the green transition from the perspective of equality and equal opportunities. Representatives from the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Iceland Arctic Cooperation Network shared good practices on integrating equality and the

green transition.

**32. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience?**

One of the regions most affected by the transition to a more climate-friendly economy in Estonia, is Ida-Viru County due to its reliance on the oil shale industry. To counter the effects of the transition to climate neutrality will have and is already having - the greatest impact on this region the European Union's Just Transition Fund is specifically targeted at Ida-Viru County.

The EU's Just Transition Mechanism, established in 2020, aims to 'Support economy, employment, people, and the environment in regions facing significant socio-economic challenges due to the EU's 2030 energy and climate goals and the 2050 climate neutrality target'. In Estonia Just Transition consists of three pillars:

- First Pillar – Just Transition Fund:
  - For Estonia, the fund amounts to approximately €340 million, with technical assistance totaling around €353 million.
- Second Pillar – Just Transition Scheme under InvestEU:
  - Financial instruments for the private sector, focusing on sustainable infrastructure, development, innovation, and digitization. One goal is to ensure access to financing for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- Third Pillar – Public Sector Loan and Grant Scheme:
  - Loans can cover up to 50% of the total investment, with grants accounting for up to 15% of the loan.

In Estonia, 80% of the Just Transition Fund funds are directed towards diversifying and restructuring the economy and workforce in Ida-Viru County. The remaining funds address the social, environmental, and community aspects of the transition. One of the activities in fund to strengthen efforts to more gender equal society foresees a training, advisory, and support system, that will be created and implemented for the local governments in Ida-Viru County.

**33. Please describe your country's national strategy or action plan for gender equality, including its name, the period it covers, its priority, funding and alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the targets under SDG 5.**

The development plan takes into account the targets set in the country's long-term

development strategy 'Estonia 2035', international commitments, including the global sustainable development goals (incl gender equality and reduced inequalities) of the UN. From 2016 Estonian gender equality policy has been planned and implemented through the Welfare Development Plan which was the first time that gender equality had a governmental level wide-scale national strategy. In 2023, the government adopted a new Welfare Development Plan for 2023-2030, which outlines five sub-goals, including gender equality and equal opportunities. Actions contributing to SDG 5 is also included in other strategies such as Violence Prevention Agreement 2021-2025, Population Health Development Plan 2020-2030 or Development Plan for the Education Sector 2021–2035, but for example also in Welfare Development Plan other subgoals concerning work, welfare of elders or children.

**34. Please describe your country's system for tracking the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting), including the approximate proportion of the national budget that is invested in this area.**

Estonia does not track the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, the budget dedicated to Gender equality and equal treatment programme's budget is described under question nine.

**35. What formal mechanisms are in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

According to the Rules for Good Legislative Drafting and Technical Rules for Drafts of Legislative Acts, adopted in 2012, there is an obligation for every state institution to include interested parties, including citizen's organisations, into the discussions and decision making. This regulation is established based on subsection 27 (3) of the Government of the Republic Act. The process of involving the interest groups in the decision making is described in the Good Practice of Engagement approved by the Government.

Increasing cooperation with stakeholders and NGO-s and ensuring well-functioning advocacy is also a strategic goal set in the Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030.

Starting from 2019 Estonia has implemented a strategic partnership framework to support civil society organizations that are committed to advancing women's rights, gender equality and equal rights issues. The strategic partnership framework provides a 3-year financial support to NGO-s selected through a public competition. One of the goals of the transition to a strategic partnership framework was to reduce project-

based funding and give NGO-s the confidence to operate more sustainably both in terms of long-term strategic planning as well as financial planning.

The first round of calls for strategic partnerships for promotion of gender equality took place in 2019. The second round was announced in 2022 and resulted in three-year strategic partnership agreements with the Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre and NGO Oma Tuba (together with Praxis Centre for Policy Studies) and Estonian Human Rights Centre. Next round of strategic partnership will start from 2025.

The strategic partnership agreements support implementation of the gender equality goals defined in the Welfare Development Plan. The activities carried out by the partners within the framework of the strategic partnership include advocacy work, communication and awareness raising, research, trainings etc. The total budget for gender equality and equal rights strategic partnership agreements is 1,5 mln euros for 2022-2024.

During the reporting period, one of the strategic partners, the Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre, organized two conferences focused on the developments of the Beijing Platform. In celebration of Beijing+30, there are also plans to hold another conference in 2025.

To ensure the sustainability and independence of non-governmental organizations' funding, it is also important, among other things, to have access to diverse sources of funding. In addition to strategic partnership agreements there are several other funding mechanisms available to NGO-s.

**36. Please describe how stakeholders have contributed to the preparation of the present national report.**

Draft of the current report was submitted for comments and proposals to the following NGOs: NGO Oma Tuba, the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable, the Estonian Human Rights Centre, Business and Professional Women Organisation in Estonia and the Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre.

**37. Please describe your country's action plan and timeline for implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (if a State party), or of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review or other United Nations human rights mechanisms that address gender inequality/discrimination against women.**

Estonia participates actively in the Universal Periodic Review and was examined lastly in this framework on 4 May 2021. Since 2021, Estonia has undertaken a coordinated



effort to implement the recommendations and voluntary commitments accepted within the framework of this procedure. In 2024, Estonia has submitted mid-term review progress report on the implementation of the recommendations made during the interactive dialogue with the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. This review provides information on the implementation of all supported recommendations (192 out of 274). Furthermore, all 274 recommendations have been considered during the drafting of the mid-term report which has resulted in the acceptance of 16 additional recommendations. An assessment of the implementation status of all recommendations made to Estonia has been undertaken. At this time, approximately 76% of recommendations supported by the government have been fully implemented, approximately 14% have been partly implemented and approximately 10% not implemented. Estonia wishes to note that all of these recommendations are important and that other recommendations that were noted, but did not enjoy the support in 2021, are kept under review and may be revisited in the future. Full document is available online via: [UPR Mid-term reports | OHCHR](#)

Since Estonia's third UPR, there have been a number of significant developments, which clearly demonstrate Estonia's commitment to the implementation of our UPR recommendations as well as the promotion and protection of human rights more broadly. The mid-term report demonstrates substantial progress Estonia has made since 2021 despite the COVID-19 pandemic which has had significant impacts on the Government's overall work programme. Principal advancements to promote gender equality and address discrimination against women are outlined in this report.

In addition, before the next review in 2026, other recommendations will be implemented, including ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Estonia values the Universal Periodic Review process as an excellent tool in the promotion and protection of human rights which helps us to keep track on the implementation and various practices while advancing human rights in the country.

Estonia submitted its report to Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2022 and received recommendations from the Committee in May 2024. The recommendations are currently under consideration.

**38. What are the most important areas in which your country has made most progress over the past five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?**

In the last five years there has been remarkable progress in the visualization of data as well as in the use of administrative data.

In 2020 web page [Earnings application](#) was launched. The earnings application shows differences in the monthly gross earnings of full-time employees by sex, county, and

occupation. It was developed in the project InWeGe (Income, Wealth, Gender) coordinated by the Commissioner's Office. The goal of the project was to provide an innovative and statistics-based web application to allow people, but especially women to make informed decisions in the labour market. The project also included research on the gender gap in income and wealth over the life cycle of people and it also analyses the gender-based differentiation in income and pension assets, focusing on trends dominating in Estonia. As a result of the research, a web application for gender differences in income and wealth was developed. The web application can be used by anyone who wants to make a job-related decision based on the current level of wages (currently prevalent in the market), given one's educational background, gender, and other data. The page was updated and enhanced in 2024 and is widely used among employees, employers as well as students and the media.

In 2019 a web application "[the Tree of Truth](#)" was created by the Government Office and Statistics Estonia to make the objectives of the country's strategies more comprehensible to the general public, the governance more transparent and performance based. The application shows the status of main indicators, comparing actual results on the basis of three national strategic documents: "Sustainable Estonia 21" strategy, "Estonia 2035" strategy and the Governmental Action Plan. The application includes indicators like Gender pay gap, Female managers, and Gender Equality Index. The application is constantly updated and available to everyone on the website of Statistics Estonia.

In 2024, Pay Mirror was launched ([informational web-page](#)). Pay Mirror is a digital tool for employers to gain statistics on their organisation's gender pay gap situation. It uses administrative data, so the employer using the tool, does not have to insert any additional data. Pay Mirror is available for all the Estonian employers (only exception being the administrative area of Defense and Interior Ministries), with at least three men and three women working there, in Labour Inspectorate Self-Service Environment (TEIS). TEIS is a mandatory portal for employers designed to assist employers in establishing a good working environment. Pay Mirror was developed in cooperation of Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication (formerly Ministry of Social Affairs), Statistics Estonia, Labour Inspectorate and Health and Welfare Information Systems Centre.

The data used is from registries and only such data is used which is entered or confirmed by the employer. That means that no data which might not be known for the employer is used in the calculations.

The Pay Mirror indicators are based on the actual wages paid and employment data that employers have entered in the register themselves (such as start and end of employment, suspensions of employment, workload and position). In the Estonian administrative data, it is not possible to distinguish between basic wages and bonuses. Therefore, the Pay Mirror indicators show the actual wages paid, which are adjusted by workload. When calculating the workload, the days absent due to temporary incapacity

for work and the days of child leave used are not taken into account because during this time, compensation is paid to the employee by the state.

The Pay Mirror indicator is not comparable to the national gender pay gap indicator published by Statistics Estonia. This is because the national gender pay gap indicator is based on gross hourly wages. Based on register data, however, it is not possible to calculate this indicator using the same methodology because there is no information about working hours in the registers.

The Pay Mirror indicators are calculated by Statistics Estonia. The data is processed at the employer's request – if the employer does not use the Pay Mirror, the indicators are not calculated. Only the employer and a person authorized by the employer have access to the indicators. That means that the Labour Inspectorate does not have any access to the data.

The indicator that the tool contain are following: the gender pay gap based on average pay and median pay, the gender distribution of the workforce, and the average and median wages for men and women, the gender gap within the organisation by occupation, average salaries of men and women by occupation, gender distribution of pay quartiles and irregular pay, which includes the average and median irregular pay, the share of men and women getting the irregular pay and gender pay gap of average irregular pay.

### **39. Over the next five years, what are your country's priorities for strengthening national gender statistics?**

In the coming years, when transposing the EU Pay Transparency Directive, the state's intention is to gather gender pay gap indicators from companies using administrative data. In addition, according to the Welfare Development Plan one of the priorities in the next five years is to enhance gender mainstreaming in Estonia which requires data and also good data visualization tools.

In 2023 Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner commissioned overview of data and data caps to monitor the situation of gender equality as well as equal treatment of minorities. According to the overview, the most challenging target group in terms of data availability is the LGBT community, for whom there is very little direct descriptive information.

Estonia is currently working to involve SOGIESC questions on the Estonian 2025 EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC). It would provide comparable information about different LGBTIQ groups in the fields, that EU-SILC covers, including work.

**40. What gender-specific indicators [7](#) has your country prioritized for monitoring progress on the SDGs?**

Estonia has defined 95 indicators to monitor progress on SDGs (and 18<sup>th</sup> national goal “Viability of Cultural Space”, which UN Agenda does not include). Most of the indicators are also covered in Estonian national strategy Estonia 2035 or other strategies. The indicators which have direct gender perspective are gender pay gap, European Institute of Gender’s Gender Equality Index, women in managerial positions and gender-disaggregated healthy life years. There is also a principle - wherever possible, data will also be presented by age, gender, ethnicity, education level, disability/special needs, and region. For indicators where significant age, gender, ethnic, educational, disability-related, or regional differences are observed, the development plans and programs in the field will aim to reduce these disparities whenever possible.

**41. Which data disaggregations are routinely provided by major surveys in your country?**

Major survey include gender, age, geographic location, income, marital status when relevant or household composition. Migratory status, a person’s perception of their health and occurrence of any long-term illness or health problem, ethnicity and religion are included in Population Census.