

Institutional developments

In October 2013 the Government of the Republic established the Gender Equality Council, set forth in the Gender Equality Act and functioning as an advisory body to the Government. Its main responsibilities are advising the Government in matters related to strategies for the promotion of gender equality, approving general objectives of gender equality policy and presenting opinions to the Government concerning the compliance of national programmes with the obligation of gender mainstreaming.

Combating gender stereotypes (strategic objective 1)

In 2013, in the framework of Estonian ESF programme “Promoting Gender Equality 2011-2013” the Ministry of Social Affairs carried out an awareness raising campaign with an aim to tackle gender stereotypes and to demonstrate their negative influence on work and career choices and people’s lives. The main activities of the campaign were career days for boys and girls, a widely noticed series of video clips and several PR-initiatives¹. In the framework of career days held in spring young people (pupils from the 10th and 11th grade) were introduced the topic of gender stereotypes and to professions traditionally considered as suitable for the other sex. They were able to try out practical tasks related to these professions and met professionals who had already made untraditional career choices. The career days were mainly held in different establishments for vocational or higher education. Boys were introduced traditionally “female professions”, for example nurse, tailor, teacher and girls traditionally “male professions”, for example ground engineer, soldier, miner, but also programming (IT). The feedback from participating young people was positive and although not many were considering afterwards choosing exactly the professions they had been introduced, most of them saw their career choices more widely.

In April 2014, on the Equal Pay Day, public discussions concerning gender pay gap were organised in all 15 counties as an awareness raising tool. It is also planned to provide financial support from the ESF programme “Promoting Gender Equality 2011-2013” for awareness raising activities on the Equal Pay Day in 2015.

Four larger-scale gender equality projects are financed through an open call from the Norway Grants 2009-2014 under the programme “Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Promoting Work-Life Balance”. Two of these projects aim to integrate gender equality issues into higher education curricula, including teacher training, two to improve possibilities for reconciling work and family life. The Estonian Women’s Associations Roundtable will implement a project on gender mainstreaming into teachers education and training; the Praxis Centre for Policy Studies will implement the project “Gender equality programme for social sciences and teacher education programme students”. A project implemented by the Responsible Business Forum aims at improving the situation of work-life balance among the employees of Estonian enterprises. To that end a series of activities are planned, including a training programme for mentors, a development programme for employers, one-on-one meetings with mentors and awareness raising events for wider audience of employers and employees. The second work-life balance project is aiming at creating a mechanism design for providing efficiency and equity in matching kindergartens and children. This project is implemented by the Tallinn University of Technology.

¹ The video clips are also available with English translation at: <http://www.stereotyyp.ee/en/>

The Government has ordered Gender Equality Monitorings in 2003, 2005, 2009 and 2013, representative surveys aiming at mapping opinions and attitudes regarding gender equality among the population. The survey also maps people's experiences with gender inequality and discrimination and covers different topics and areas of life, e.g. power, economy, working life, private life, education and violence. The results are used to assess existing gender equality policies and to develop new policy measures to reduce gender inequalities.

Preventing and combating violence against women (strategic objective 2)

In spring 2013-2014 a study on gender-based and sexual harassment at work was conducted in the framework of the ESF programme "Promoting Gender Equality 2011-2013".

Sexual violence is one of the focuses of the project financed from the Progress Programme and implemented in co-operation of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Police and Border Guard Board, the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable and the Association of Estonian Open Youth Centers. The project aims to raise awareness of the occurrence of violence against women and to create an attitude of zero tolerance against it. Among the main target groups of the project are young women and men.

An important development is also that from 2013 all 13 women's shelters, run by NGOs, providing temporary lodging and support services for victims of (domestic) violence, receive funding from the state budget. Some shelters also receive funding from local authorities. From 2014, with the help of co-financing from the Norway Grants programme, a nation-wide helpline for women experiencing violence, launched by the Estonian Women's Shelters Union in 2008, operates 24/7 free of charge.

Three pre-defined projects, one concerning gender based violence and two trafficking in human beings, are financed through a separate Norway Grants programme on domestic and gender-based violence. Additionally, one project aimed at building-up a uniform system to tackle intimate partnership violence and another to create and support a broad co-operation network to help victims of sexual violence are being financed through this programme.

Guaranteeing Equal Access of Women to Justice (strategic objective 3):

In 2013-2015 the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner carries out the project "Promoting Gender Equality through Empowerment and Mainstreaming" financed from Norway Grants in the framework of the gender equality and work-life balance programme operated by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The project has two set of activities: the first set of activities aims at increasing the effectiveness of legal protection against gender-based discrimination by raising rights awareness, helping victims of discrimination directly through implementation of strategic litigation and by increasing the capacity of officials assisting discrimination victims. The second set of activities concerns intensified promotion of gender equality and enhancement of mainstreaming gender into policies and practises. The project has a special focus on minority communities and vulnerable social groups who are more likely to be victims of gender discrimination and multiple discrimination.

Achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making (strategic objective 4)

In March 2014 a new government was formed and the percentage of women increased from 15% to 36% (from 2 to 5).²

Achieving Gender Mainstreaming in all policies and measures (strategic objective 5)

In 2014, the Ministry of Finance made available guidelines for policy makers to be taken into account when preparing development plans and also when planning measures to be financed from the EU Cohesion Policy funds in order to give guidance for promoting “recurrent topics” among which is also gender equality. Ministry of Social Affairs provides guidance for colleagues from other ministries to enhance implementation of this obligation.

In autumn 2014, a process began to develop a strategy and an action plan for promoting gender equality in 2016-2023. This is planned to become a part of a wider strategic document of social inclusion, social protection and equal opportunities and to include measures to support gender mainstreaming.

² From 3rd of November the number of women in the government is 6.