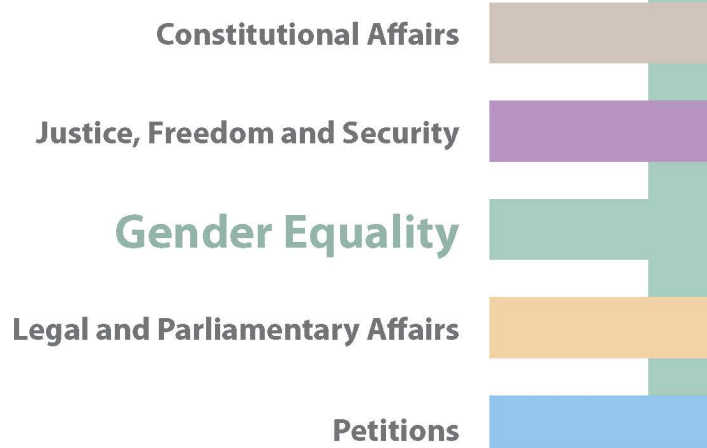


DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT **C**
CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS



The Policy on Gender Equality in Latvia

In-depth analysis for the FEMM Committee





DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT C: CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

WOMEN'S RIGHTS & GENDER EQUALITY

The Policy on Gender Equality in Latvia

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Abstract

Upon request by the FEMM Committee, this in-depth analysis provides an overview of the existing gender equality legislation, policies and practices in Latvia. The note discusses gender equality in decision making, employment, reconciliation of work and family life, eradication of violence against women, and regarding health and reproductive rights. Gender equality being a relatively new policy area in Latvia, substantial progress has been made in the last decade through the implementation of EU legislation and the work of non-governmental organizations. However, more work needs to be done in order to reach gender equality.

Document requested by the
Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The concept of gender equality is relatively new in Latvia. The gender machinery was established in 1999. The Ministry of Welfare became the main institution responsible for development of gender equality policy. Since then, Latvia has not yet managed to develop a strong and consistent gender equality policy. The accession of Latvia in the EU contributed to the promotion of gender equality in the national policy agenda.

Latvia has no specific anti-discrimination law or gender equality law. The most important laws promoting gender equality are the Labour Law and the Labour Protection Law. During the last decade the Ministry of Welfare developed three Programmes for the Implementation of Gender Equality.

Latvia has no legislation or recommendations for the promotion of equal gender representation in political and business spheres. Nevertheless, in this area, Latvian women are better represented in decision-making positions than women in other EU Member States, especially in business management. Gender stereotypes are commonly mentioned as the main obstacle to equal representation.

Latvia doesn't have an integrated approach to the eradication of violence against women. The cooperation between the institutions is relatively weak. There are two areas where the policy is relatively well developed: prevention of domestic violence and prevention of trafficking in human beings.

Women have relatively strong position in the labour market. This positive historical legacy is reinforced by financial considerations. Nevertheless, there are strong gender stereotypes and gender segregation across fields of education, occupations and economic sectors. This leads to a persistent gender pay gap which has not been addressed sufficiently by policy makers.

The Labour Law ensures equal rights to work, fair working conditions and fair pay for all people regardless of their gender. The Labour Inspectorate and the Ombudsperson's Office (Tiesībsargs) monitor the application of the principle of gender equality in the labour market. However, enforcement of the Labour Law is sometimes weak in Latvia.

Latvia has one of the highest proportions of people who experience conflict in reconciling work and family life. Quite generous maternity, paternity and parental benefits provide good financial support up to the point when a child turns 1.5 years old. Public childcare organised by local governments offers reconciliation options from 1.5 up to 7 years. However, there is a shortage of places for small children. While the Government introduced several policies in 2013 trying to address this issue, it is doubtful if there will be an evaluation to what extent these measures have achieved their goal.

In Latvia, the difference in life expectancy between women and men is much higher than in other EU countries. Men typically have more unhealthy lifestyles and are more likely to die from external causes of death (especially suicides).

In the area of sexual and reproductive health, infertility is considered to be a significant problem. Latvia has a high abortion rate which seems to be related to insufficient knowledge and scant use of contraception. The rate of caesarean sections is high and increasing. The evidence suggests that the guidelines for indication of caesarean sections must be revised.

INTRODUCTION

This note describes the current policies, practices and legislation regarding gender equality in Latvia. It covers the following themes: equal economic independence, reconciliation of work and family life, equal representation of men and women in decision-making positions, eradication of gender based violence, and elimination of gender stereotypes. It also discusses the issues of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The concept of gender equality is relatively new in Latvia. Latvia regained its independence in 1990 and its legal system had to undergo substantial changes in a very short period of time. Gender equality was not a top priority during this turbulent time. Therefore, Latvia has not managed to develop a strong and consistent gender equality policy. The gender machinery was established in Latvia in 1999 with the Ministry of Welfare becoming the body responsible for the development of gender equality policy. The accession of Latvia to the EU and the adoption of the *Acquis Communautaire* contributed to the promotion of gender equality in the national policy agenda.

Latvia takes an integrated approach to gender mainstreaming. This means that the principles of gender equality are taken into consideration while developing policies in any area and at all levels. However, gender mainstreaming is not directly emphasised in policy measures. This makes the analysis of gender equality policies and legislation more complex.

Achievements in gender equality in Latvia have been seriously challenged by the recent economic crisis. Limited financial resources and across-the-board budget cuts put many activities in the field of gender equality on hold.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

KEY FINDINGS

- Women in Latvia have a relatively strong position in the labour market and a high participation in economic and political decision making.
- Gender stereotypes lead to strong gender segregation across fields of education, occupations and economic sectors.
- Lack of flexible employment arrangements and childcare facilities makes reconciliation of work and family life difficult.
- The Ministry of Welfare is responsible for the development of gender equality policy in Latvia since 1999.
- The Gender Equality Unit is the main executive institution for gender equality policy and the Gender Equality Commission has a consultative and coordinating role.
- The most important laws containing gender equality norms are the Labour Law and the Labour Protection Law.
- During the last decade, three Programmes for the Implementation of Gender Equality have been launched by the government.

1.1. Background

Latvia regained its independence in 1990. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Latvia emerged as a country with a relatively high engagement of women in paid work. Women with small children had a strong tradition of reconciling work and family life. This can be considered as a positive legacy of the Soviet regime, where women worked the same number of hours as men and were strongly encouraged to take advantage of state provided childcare, paid maternity leave and other reconciliation policies.

Nevertheless, strong gender stereotypes still exist in Latvia and are reflected in gender segregation across fields of education, occupations and economic sectors. Also the formal understanding of the concept of gender equality is not well established. The understanding of gender equality is weak among citizens in general but also among politicians.

The traditional cultural values of Latvia are the values of the patriarchal peasant family. In this context women are respected and enjoy some privileges but their role is mainly seen as a mother's role. The traditional values are still quite strongly supported by nationalistic movements in Latvia.

During its short history, the state of Latvia experienced vast cultural, political and economic changes. In such turbulent times, gender equality was not at the top of the

political agenda. However, gender equality issues gained more attention following the EU accession.

1.2. Main gender equality issues

Latvia is ranked below the EU average according to the European Gender Equality Index. Latvia has an indicator above the average only in one area: Power. This is due to a relatively high participation of women in economic and political decision making. Latvia had a female president in the past and currently has a female prime minister. In 2014, the share of women in decision-making positions in publicly listed companies was the highest in the EU. However, there are no policies that support women's participation in decision making.

Women in Latvia historically have high levels of employment and participation in the labour market. They also have high levels of educational attainments. However, the skills acquired by women are different from those acquired by men. In Latvia, gender stereotypes are quite strong. Segregation in fields of education, as well as in occupations and economic sectors is pronounced and results in a persistent gender pay gap. Employment policies in Latvia are mostly gender neutral. Such issues as segregation and stereotypes are largely addressed through awareness raising campaigns and informative seminars.

People in Latvia have difficulties in reconciling work and family life. The lack of flexible employment arrangements and childcare facilities for children below the compulsory school age frequently put a double burden of work and care on women (who are still seen as the main care providers) compared to men. Some improvements have been made regarding the availability of childcare for small children by both increasing the number of places in the public preschool institutions and co-financing the costs of private care. However, it is doubtful if an assessment of the effectiveness of these measures will be carried out.

The poor work-life balance doesn't help to solve the acute demographic problems that Latvia faces. Latvia has one of the lowest fertility rates in the EU and an ageing population. The demographic situation is one of the main topics on the Latvian policy agenda. The child-related benefits, therefore, are seen rather as a measure for improving the demographic situation than in connection with gender equality. While the father's role in the family is supported and promoted, the mother's role is seen as naturally occurring. In this context, the promotion of equal sharing of paid and unpaid work between men and women is weak.

Violence against women is widespread in Latvia but there is a lack of reliable and consistent statistics on this topic. There is no integrated approach to eradicate gender based violence. The cooperation between the institutions involved is relatively weak. Nevertheless, the issue of violence has got a lot of attention in the recent years and some progress has been made.

1.3. Gender equality infrastructure

The gender machinery in Latvia was established in 1999 with the Ministry of Welfare becoming the main institution responsible for the development of gender equality policy in Latvia. The Ministry is responsible for the coordination of the gender equality policy, monitoring and assessment of gender equality initiatives, monitoring the overall situation, and gender impact assessments.

In 2003, the Gender Equality Unit was organised within the Ministry of Welfare in order to coordinate and promote responses to issues of gender equality. Since December 2009, the Gender Equality Unit has been part of the Department of Equal Opportunities. The Gender Equality Council was established in 2002 to ensure the implementation of the gender equality policy at the highest level. In May 2010, it was reorganised into the Gender Equality Commission, which coordinates gender equality policy and promotes cooperation between Ministries, non-governmental organisations, social partners, municipalities and other bodies. The Gender Equality Unit is the main executive institution for gender equality policy within the Latvian administration. The Gender Equality Commission has a consultative role and also a role in co-ordinating gender equality policy between different stakeholders.

Latvia takes an 'integrated approach' to gender mainstreaming.¹ This means that the principles of gender equality are taken into consideration while developing policies in any area and at all levels. However, gender is not mentioned in policy measures and it is difficult to evaluate its effectiveness. In order to ensure gender mainstreaming, each Ministry and the State Chancellery has delegated one public official who is responsible for the implementation of the fundamental principle of gender equality in his or her area of competence.

Latvia has no specific anti-discrimination law or gender equality law. The general principle of equality is enshrined in Article 91 of the Constitution of Latvia. It states that: "All human beings in Latvia shall be equal before the law and the courts. Human rights shall be realised without discrimination of any kind."

The most important sectorial laws containing norms promoting gender equality are the Labour Law and the Labour Protection Law (in force since 2002). The Labour Law includes a general provision prohibiting direct and indirect discrimination on several grounds including sex. The relevant European Commission Directives on equal opportunities are incorporated into these two documents².

The first strategic document in the field of gender equality policy in Latvia was the Concept Paper on Gender Equality Implementation (Ministry of Welfare, 2001). The Concept Paper is used as a fundamental basis for the development of further plans of action and documents to implement the goals of the gender equality policy.

During the last decade, three operational documents in the field of gender equality have been launched by the government. The first one was the Programme for the Implementation of Gender Equality 2005–2006 (Ministry of Welfare, 2004). Its aim was to promote an efficient, integrated and coordinated implementation of gender equality

¹ See the website of the Ministry of Welfare: <http://www.lm.gov.lv/text/726>

² The links to all legislative documents used in this report are provided in the list of references.

issues and develop sustainable institutional mechanisms. Four main directions of action were identified: (1) raising awareness in the society about gender equality issues; (2) reconciliation of work and family life; (3) improvement of the administrative capacity to work with gender equality issues and improve gender equality policy mechanism; and (4) prevention of violence.

The second document, the Programme for the Implementation of Gender Equality 2007–2010 (Ministry of Welfare, 2006), focused on six directions (in line with the EU Roadmap for Gender Equality): (1) awareness raising about gender equality of the general public; (2) training on gender equality for specialists in central governmental institutions and other specialists; (3) improvement of monitoring of gender equality policy implementation; (4) highlighting the issue of domestic violence; (5) studying the health-related lifestyle habits of men and women, and (6) reconciliation of work and family life. The implementation of the programme took place in the very difficult period of severe economic crisis. Therefore many of the planned initiatives were suspended due to the lack of financial resources.

The third and latest national gender equality document is the Programme for the Implementation of Gender Equality 2012-2014 developed by the Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with other Ministries, institutions, and non-governmental organisations (Ministry of Welfare, 2011). This plan continues the activities commenced in the previous two Programmes. The Plan focuses on four major action areas: (1) reduction of gender roles and stereotypes; (2) promotion of healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyles for men and women; (3) promotion of economic independence for men and women and their equal opportunities in the labour market; (4) monitoring and evaluating gender equality policy. Because of the lack of financial resources and budget cuts, the Plan only includes policy measures which do not require additional financial or human resources. The Ministry of Welfare is going to publish an informative report about the implementation of this Plan by July 1, 2015. The development of the next Programme is planned for the third quarter of 2015.

So far, Latvia hasn't developed gender budgeting or auditing. The report by EIGE (2014b) on Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Gender Equality informs that Latvia has no legal obligations to use methods of gender impact assessment and gender budgeting, and that the latter is a practically unknown in Latvia.

2. THEMATIC DISPOSITIONS

2.1. Equal participation in decision making

KEY FINDINGS

- Latvia has no legislation or recommendations for the promotion of equal gender representation in political and business spheres.
- Initially, Latvia rejected the European Commission proposal to set a target for the minimum representation of men and women among non-executive directors in listed companies.
- According to the European Gender Equality Index, « power » is one area where Latvia's performance is above the average.
- There are a number of studies on factors that promote or hinder women's participation in decision making. Stereotypes are mentioned as an important obstacle in all of them.

Latvia has no legislation or recommendations regarding gender quotas in political or economic spheres. Despite this, equal participation of men and women in decision making is one area where Latvia performs relatively well according to the European Gender Equality Index of 2012.

2.1.1. Political decision making

Women in Latvia are quite visible in the political sphere. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga was the first female president in charge from 1999 to 2007. Solvita Āboltiņa was the speaker of the Parliament from 2010 to 2014. Laimdota Straujuma is the first female prime minister elected in 2014. These women serve as positive role models for Latvian women in general.

However, despite these positive examples, the proportion of women in decision making positions is much lower than that of men. In the national parliament about one member out of five is a woman. Over the last 4 years the share of women increased reaching 26% in the 3rd quarter of 2014.³ But after the elections in October 2014, the share dropped again to 18%, which is one of the lowest since 2004. In 2014, only 1 out of 6 major political parties was led by a woman. The proportion of women in the national government is 29%. Over time, the indicators tend to improve slowly. Latvia's performance with respect to these indicators is around the average of the EU-28.

The presence of women in politics is not supported by quotas or any other policies. There are no regulatory impediments for the participation of women in politics either. Experts

³ The statistics used in this chapter are from the database on men and women in decision making : http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/index_en.htm

suggest that stereotypes play an important role⁴. The prevailing image of a man in politics is that of an assertive, strong and rational individual, whereas a woman is seen as emotional and unreliable. The media bluntly focuses not only on the professional performance of women-politicians but also on their appearance.

The main obstacles for women in politics, according to Putnina and Ziverte (2004) and the University of Latvia (2004) are: vertical gender segregation in politics, negative attitudes of women to politics based on moral grounds, high importance of informal networks in politics of which women are not a part, gender stereotypes, influence of the media, and lack of mutual support and collaboration between female politicians.

2.1.2. Administrative and economic decision making

Despite not having gender quotas, Latvia has a relatively high proportion of women in administrative and economic decision making positions. Latvia has the highest share of women in decision-making positions in publicly listed companies in the EU in 2014 (31%). This is substantially higher than the EU-28 average of 19%. The share of women in decision-making positions is stable in the central bank (21%), and increased in the Supreme Court (to 55% in 2014). In the national public administration the proportion increased (up to 61% in 2013). All these indicators are above the respective EU-28 averages.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there is an evidence of vertical gender segregation in public administration and supreme courts. The proportion of women is substantially higher in the low-grade positions than in the high-grade positions (Ministry of Welfare, 2014).

There are no special measures to promote gender-balanced representation in business and economic decision making. The debate around this issue focuses mainly on the introduction of gender quotas in boards of big companies. However, it is widely believed that there is no need for such measures because the representation of women in business and politics is quite good compared to other EU countries. It is believed that women face no obstacles in taking part in decision making in business and that quotas will only result in additional constraints on companies.⁵

Consequently, in May 2013, Latvia rejected the European Commission proposal to set the target on the proportion of non-executive directors in listed companies of the less represented gender: 40% by 2020. Interestingly, women-politicians also did not support gender quotas. The former Latvian president, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, expressed her disapproval of gender quotas calling them 'demeaning'.⁶ The Latvian parliament's speaker, Solvita Āboltiņa, also spoke out against gender quotas, while favouring the promotion of equality in educational and economic independence of men and women.

In November 2014, the study of the situation of men and women in large companies of Latvia (conducted within the social solidarity program "Progress" coordinated by the Social Integration Fund) was published (SAFEGE BALTIJA & ArtSmart, 2014). This is an

⁴ See discussion "Woman's and man's role in politics" organized by research centre Providus: <http://providus.lv/article/iespeja-diskusija-sievietes-un-viriesa-loma-politika-latvija>

⁵ See discussion on gender quotes in company boards: <http://www.diena.lv/diena-tv/politika/diskusija-vai-vajadzetu-ieviest-kvotas-sievietem-uznemumu-valdes-13891042>

⁶ <http://euobserver.com/political/31944>

extensive study of the factors that hinder or promote women's participation in corporate decision-making.

The study reveals that local companies rarely have any supportive actions or initiatives to attract women-employees into different levels of company governance. Such practises more often exist in branches of international companies in Latvia. Some good practices are: monitoring certain indicators (e.g. number of employees at different levels and their pay by gender), inclusion of gender equality considerations in internal company documents, social events to integrate employees of the less represented gender into the company, and initiatives to support life and work balance for women and men with small children.

According to the study, the main obstacles for women's participation in high levels of company governance are traditional views on gender roles and stereotypes. The study provides policy recommendation for policy makers, social partners, non-governmental institutions and companies.

2.2. Eradication of gender based violence

KEY FINDINGS

- Latvia doesn't have an integrated approach to eradicate violence against women. The cooperation between the institutions is weak.
- Statistics on gender based violence are scattered and incomplete, and often not mutually comparable.
- Within the Programme on the Prevention of Domestic Violence 2008-2011 some steps were taken towards improving legislation and cooperation between institutions. State funded social rehabilitation services are introduced in 2015. NGOs remain the main providers of services for victims of domestic violence.
- The Latvian Criminal Law defines and criminalises trafficking of human beings and sending people for sexual exploitation.
- The National Strategy for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings 2014-2020 aims to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings, protect and assist victims, and to promote cross-sectoral cooperation.

Latvia doesn't have an integrated policy approach to eradicate violence against women. The cooperation and coordination between the institutions involved (i.e. the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Health, the Court Administration, the State and Local Police, and non-governmental organisations) is relatively weak.

Violence against women is both widespread and underreported (Putnina, 2008). Victims of abuse are often uninformed of their rights and are reluctant to report incidents to the police. There was a lot of progress on collecting statistics related to gender based

violence in the recent years.⁷ However, the data are still quite scattered and incomplete, and frequently not mutually comparable because of the use of different methodology.⁸

The most recent data on domestic violence is available in the Informative Report on Domestic Violence published by the Ministry of Welfare (2013). According to this report, every second injured woman in Latvia was injured by her partner. Out of all detected cases of violence against women, around 40% took place within the family. A quarter of all violent crimes (murders and physical abuse) on which the person is convicted take place within the family. Every day police in Latvia receive on average 13 calls about conflicts within the family. Over the past three years, 16 women were murdered and 60 were seriously injured in domestic violence incidents.

2.2.1. Domestic violence

Latvia did not yet ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

The first state Programme on the Prevention of Domestic Violence 2008-2011 was introduced in 2008 (Ministry of Welfare, 2008). It did not include any budgetary means to fight domestic violence. Most of the measures were aimed at gathering statistical information and analysing it, and informing related specialists and the general public about domestic violence. Some steps were taken towards improving legislation and cooperation between relevant institutions. Despite the lack of statistics and reliable information, non-governmental organisations have to be considered the main providers of services (rehabilitation, shelters, hotlines, etc.) to victims of domestic violence.

The topic of domestic violence gained more attention in the recent years and several important policies have been introduced:

In March 2014, the new regulation on protection from domestic violence⁹ aimed at reducing domestic violence and the protection of (potential) victims of violence came into force. With this regulation the police will be able to force a violent person to leave the home, restrict this person from returning home and prevent them from approaching the (potential) victim for a period of seven days.

In 2015, for the first time state funded social rehabilitation services for adult victims of domestic violence as well as perpetrators have been introduced. The services for victims will include social rehabilitation courses in social rehabilitation institutions and professional advice of psychologists and lawyers. For perpetrators, the state will provide individual consultations and group sessions that will help to reduce violent behaviour. The rehabilitation services for perpetrators are based on the successful pilot project that took place in 2011-2013, organized by the Ministry of Welfare in collaboration with five local governments. The rehabilitation services were offered in special groups where psychologists and social workers worked with people who committed domestic violence. All municipalities evaluated the pilot project as very valuable.

⁷ EIGE (2014a) offers a comprehensive technical analysis on the availability of administrative data sources in cross-country perspective.

⁸ In November 2013, the Cabinet of Ministers issued the protocol decision to take steps towards improvement of collection and managements of statistics on gender violence.

⁹ Available at: <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=265314>

2.2.2. Sexual violence

In Latvia the term "sexual violence" is mainly used in the context of sexual violence against children and domestic violence. Apart from this, "sexual violence" is regulated by the Criminal Law. It is covered in the definition of crimes against humanity and human trafficking. Chapter 7 on "Criminal offences against morals, and sexual inviolability"¹⁰ includes such types of sexual violence as rape and forcible sexual assault.

In 2014, an amendment to the Criminal Law was made which expanded the definition of rape to include cases when sexual intercourse was forced on the victim using authority, victim's trust or similar.

The information campaign "Violence is no small secret. Talk about it!" takes place regularly (most recently in April 2013, May 2014 and November 2014). Children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse could call the hotline and report cases of sexual violence and receive professional psychological counselling and support, as well as necessary information. The goal of this action is to help children and young people to recognise sexual violence, prevent it, and reduce adverse effects. In the context of this campaign information materials have been prepared.¹¹

2.2.3. Harassment

Latvian law does not contain a precise definition of "harassment". The Labour Law (Section 29 on Prohibition of Differential Treatment) addresses harassment at work.

2.2.4. Harmful practices

Latvia has ratified various international conventions condemning female genital mutilation (FGM). In the national law, criminal offenses related to harmful practices like FGM are regulated by the Criminal Law. According to EIGE (2013), victims of FGM are not identified in Latvia.

2.2.5. Human trafficking and sexual exploitation

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation is not a prevalent offense type in the Latvian territory. So far, there have been no (discovered) cases of forced labour exploitation as defined by the Latvian Criminal Law. However, Latvia has become the country of origin for victims of trafficking in human beings. Poverty and social exclusion, adverse effects of the recent economic crisis lead to massive emigration, which is a risk factor contributing to human trafficking. Latvian nationals are mainly found in exploitative conditions in Ireland, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Greece, Belgium, and Sweden. Groups at risk of becoming victims of trafficking are mainly young women, single mothers, the unemployed, people from large and low-income families, from children's homes and social care institutions, persons with low levels of education, and persons with high debts.¹²

¹⁰ « Noziedz gi nodar jumi pr t tikum bu un dzimumneaizskaram bu » (latv.).

¹¹ Comics and an information page are available at:

www.bti.gov.lv/lat/uzticibas_talrunis/pretvardarbibas_kampana/

¹² The website on human trafficking in Latvia: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv>

The provisions of Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims were included in several national legal acts, such as the Criminal Law, the Criminal Procedure Law, the Law on State Compensation to Victims, and two Cabinet regulations. All came into force in January- April 2013¹³.

In January 2014, the National Strategy for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings 2014-2020 was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers (Ministry of the Interior, 2013). Its aim is to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings, protect and assist victims of human trafficking with full respect for their human rights, and to promote cross-sectoral cooperation to achieve this goal. This national strategy is the third government policy planning document to prevent human trafficking.

In August 2014, the Latvian Prime Minister issued an order for organizing the working group to coordinate the implementation of the Anti-Trafficking Guidelines 2014-2020. The group's task will be to coordinate the national regulatory authorities, local governments and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the guidelines, as well as to ensure the efficient information exchange and coherent action in human trafficking prevention and provision of social services to victims of trafficking.

The Latvian Criminal Law defines and criminalises trafficking of human beings (Article 154) and sending people for sexual exploitation (Article 165)¹⁴. In 2006, the Latvian Supreme Court also recognized sending a person for sexual exploitation with their consent as a form of human trafficking.

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/member-states/latvia-2-institutional-and-legal-framework_en

¹⁴ Article 165 „Sending a person for sexual exploitation“ (Chapter XVI on Criminal Offences against Morals, and Sexual Inviolability) is separated from Article 146.1 on Human Trafficking (Chapter XV on Criminal Offences against Personal Liberty, Honour and Dignity). However, the definition of human trafficking (Article 146.2) also includes involvement of a person in prostitution or in other kinds of sexual exploitation.

2.3. Women in the labour market

KEY FINDINGS

- Latvian women historically have high employment rates and participation in the labour market.
- The Labour Law ensures equal rights to work, fair working conditions and fair pay for all people regardless of their gender. It also regulates temporary work and working hours.
- The Labour Inspectorate and the Ombudsperson's Office monitor the application of the principle of gender equality in the labour market. However, enforcement of the Labour Law is still relatively weak in Latvia.
- Segregation in economic sectors, occupations and fields of education results in, among other factors, a persistent gender pay gap. The recently announced Inclusive Employment Guidelines 2014-2020 propose to use the unadjusted gender pay gap to assess performance of gender equality policy in the labour market.
- The statutory retirement age for both men and women is going to increase to 65 by 2025. Following the substantial increase of the employment rate of older women (55-64) after the previous pension reform, it is now above the EU average.

Women in Latvia historically have high levels of employment and participation in the labour market. Dual-earner families are also more common because of financial considerations. Women have high levels of educational attainments. In 2013, a third of Latvian women (15-64) had tertiary education, while the EU-28 average proportion was 26.8%.¹⁵

However, the skills acquired by women are likely to be different from those acquired by men. Horizontal segregation in fields of education, as well as in occupations and economic sectors is very high and contributes considerably to the persistent gender pay gap. Latvia still has relatively strong gender stereotypes.

2.3.1. Labour Law

The Labour Law ensures equal rights to work, to have fair, safe and healthy working conditions, and to receive fair work remuneration for all people regardless of their gender as well as age, race, skin colour, religion etc. The law also prohibits unequal treatment on the ground of gender with respect to access to training, promotion, and dismissal. According to the Law, the employer has an obligation to set equal pay for men and women

¹⁵ Eurostat database.

performing equal work or work of equal value. In 2013, the Commission considered that Latvian law is in conformity with Directive 2006/54/EC¹⁶.

The Labour Law regulates the maximum duration of employment relations under temporary contracts (3 years or 10 months for seasonal works) and specifies situations when temporary contracts are permitted. It also regulates working hours, the standard working week and situations when the employer (upon request) must implement a shorter working week for an employee (in case of pregnancy or after birth, in the period of breastfeeding etc.). Both employees with temporary contracts and part-time employees are subject to the same rules as full-time employees with indefinite contracts.

However, part-time employment and temporary employment are not very common in Latvia and do not have a strong gender dimension. Part-time employment constituted only 10% of total employment among women and 6.1% among men in 2013. The respective indicators for the EU-28 average are much higher, especially for women: 32.8%. The share of employees with fixed-term contracts was 5.3% among men and 3.6% among women in 2013. As a general rule, employment contracts in Latvia are concluded for an unspecified period of time. Fixed-term contracts are only permitted in special cases, such as seasonal work, replacement of an employee who is absent, etc. The EU-28 average share of employees with fixed-term contracts for men and women is 13.3% and 14.3% respectively.¹⁷

The extensive work on the revision of the Labour Law was done in 2013-2014. The new amendments come into force in January 2015. The duration of special protection for female workers who are breastfeeding is restricted (e.g. norms related to pay, layoff, overtime, etc.). The new rules state that in cases not associated with the need to protect occupational health and safety, and maternal and child health, such special protection norms should be limited to the period when a child is below two years old (previously no restrictions applied). Special reliefs for workers with dependent children are introduced, e.g. an additional day of annual leave, the right for temporary absence from work due to child's sickness (or health check), and restrictions on the deductions from the salary (due to employer's losses).

It has to be noted that the enforcement of the Law is still relatively weak in the Latvian labour market. Many aspects of employment are subject to private arrangements between employee and employer and may often violate legal norms.

The role of social partners for gender equality at the work place is very limited. According to Eurofound (2014), social partners in Latvia have not developed policies to address gender equality. They are trying to make sure that the importance of the issue is understood within their organizations but there are no specific policies or concrete actions.

There are two institutions in Latvia which have the competence to monitor the application of the principle of gender equality in the labour market: the Labour Inspectorate and the Ombudsperson's Office. The Ombudsperson's Office investigates cases of pay discrimination in reaction to complaints submitted by individuals. However, the number of such complaints is usually small. The majority of complaints are about maternity related lay-offs and failure to provide equal conditions for women returning after child care leave. The Labour Inspectorate has the right to monitor the application of all labour law. However,

¹⁶ See COM(2013) 861 final on the application of Directive 2006/54/EC, p.4.

¹⁷ Eurostat database.

so far, both institutions have not taken systematic action to tackle gender inequality and discrimination in the labour market.

2.3.2. Gender pay gap

Segregation in economic sectors, occupations and fields of education (especially concentration of women in low paid sectors, such as health and education) results in a persistent gender pay gap.

The unadjusted gender pay gap¹⁸ increased substantially in 2008-2010 (up to 15.5%) but reduced to 13.8% in 2012¹⁹. It is possible that public sector pay cuts contributed to widening the gender pay gap in 2008-2010, as public sector traditionally is one of the most important sectors for women's employment. The narrowing of the gender pay gap observed in 2010 coincides with resumed growth in public sector wages.

The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia regularly publishes estimates of the unadjusted gender pay gap by economic activity and by occupation. A more comprehensive national study on gender pay difference was conducted by the marketing research group FACTUM and the Baltic Institute of Social Science (BISS) in 2006. The results show that the unadjusted gender pay gap is about 22-28% and it narrows down to 18.5-21.5% if observable characteristics of men and women (including professions) are controlled for.

In August 2014, the new Inclusive Employment Guidelines 2014-2020 were announced²⁰. The aim of the guidelines is to promote the formation of an inclusive labour market, reduce social consequences of unemployment, and foster return of unemployed people into work. The guidelines also acknowledge the problem of high gender segregation in economic sectors and occupations in Latvia and the resulting gender pay gap. One of the chapters of the report discusses equal opportunities for men and women in the labour market. The proposed indicator to assess performance of policy action is the unadjusted gender pay gap. However, the link between the target and the proposed policy action is missing. It is not clear which policy measures are aimed to promote gender equality in the labour market and reduce gender segregation and the gender pay gap.

2.3.3. Older women

The statutory retirement age in Latvia is 62 years and 6 months for both men and women in 2015. The effective retirement age is above the official retirement age: at 65.2 years for men and 64.5 years for women in 2011.²¹ Since pensions are on average relatively low, older people have incentives to remain in paid employment longer if their health conditions allow them to do so.

The latest implemented reform is an increase in the statutory retirement age. In order to improve the long-term sustainability of the pension system, it has been decided to increase the retirement age from 62 to 65 years (for both sexes) between 2014 and 2025.

¹⁸ The unadjusted gender pay gap is defined as the relative difference (in percentage) between the average gross hourly earnings of women and men. See more on this indicator here: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics

¹⁹ Eurostat database.

²⁰ The draft of the guidelines is available at: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/mk/tap/?pid=40331535>

²¹ Eurostat database.

The retirement age will increase by 3 months every year. The possibility of early retirement will be maintained, however, the age for early retirement will also increase gradually from 60 to 63 years. The minimum working experience to qualify for the old-age pension is currently 15 years (up from 10 years in 2013). From 2025 it will increase to 20 years.

It should be noted that this is not the first time that the statutory pension age is increased in Latvia. In the Soviet times, Latvia had a low statutory pension age: 60 for men and 55 for women. It has been gradually raised up to 62 in 2008.

The employment rate of older women (55-64) responded positively to reforms of the pension age. It more than doubled in 2000-2008 (from 27% to 56%). It decreased during the years of economic crisis, but now it is back on the increasing path. In 2013, it was more than 10 p.p. above the EU-28 average.²²

It can be expected that the employment of older women is going to increase in the years to come if the economic situation is positive. Nevertheless, it is also possible that some women may choose to retire earlier because of the deterioration in their health and working skills.

According to European Commission (2013), Latvia has the third lowest gender gap in pensions in the EU: 9%. In the EU-27 on average the gap is 39%. Such a low pension gap in Latvia is related to the fact that the majority of pensioners earned their pensions during the Soviet time period. Wage differentials between men and women were small and women didn't have long career interruptions.

2.4. Reconciliation of work and family life

KEY FINDINGS

- Many people in Latvia experience a conflict in reconciling work and family life.
- Maternity, paternity and parental benefits are quite generous, but are seen primarily as means for improving fertility. When a child turns 1.5 years old, financial support for parents substantially reduces.
- Public childcare is organised by local governments (in kindergartens). There is a shortage of places for children from 1.5 to 4 years old. In 2013, several policies have been introduced to address this issue.
- The Labour Law ensures the right of employees with children to request part-time work. In practice, part-time work is uncommon.

Reconciling work and raising small children was the norm for women in the Soviet times. Women took advantage of full-time child care, maternity leave and other policies reconciling work and family life. After regaining independence in 1990, the employment of women with small children was considered as a sign of a socialist regime and was not

²² Eurostat database.

ideologically promoted (Putnina, 2008). However, financial considerations forced women to remain in the labour market.

Nowadays, according to Eurofound (2010), Latvia has one of the highest proportions of people who experience a conflict reconciling work and family life. Lack of flexible employment arrangements and childcare facilities for children below the compulsory school age frequently put a double burden of work and care especially on women (who are still seen as the main care providers).

Poor work-life balance doesn't help to solve the demographic problems that Latvia faces. Latvia had one of the lowest fertility rates in the EU in 2010-2011. In 2012, the indicator improved up to 1.44. However, this is still below the EU-28 average of 1.58.²³

The child-related benefits in Latvia are seen primarily as a measure for improving the demographic situation, rather than means of reconciling work and family life and promoting equal sharing of paid and unpaid work between men and women.

As mentioned above, strengthening the father's role in the family is one of the important directions of the Latvian policy. At the same time, the mother's role remains relatively unchanged.

2.4.1. Maternity, paternity and parental leaves

The duration of maternity leave is usually 126 calendar days (a minimum of 112 in case a woman registers with a doctor after the 12th week of pregnancy; a maximum of 140 days in special circumstances). 70 or 56 calendar days (depending on the circumstances) are granted before and after the child's birth. Paternity leave is 10 calendar days. Both maternity and paternity benefits are calculated as 80% of the average contribution wage.

Parental or childcare leave is granted for each parent for a period not exceeding 18 months (and can be used until the child reaches eight years). Parental benefit is paid only to one of the parents: a mother or a father. However, there are no provisions which would allow parents to share the paid leave equally.

The parental benefit consists of two parts: non-contributory and contributory. The non-contributory part equals EUR 171 per month. The contributory part is calculated as a percentage of the average contribution wage. The percentage depends on the duration of the benefits: 60% if the benefit is paid for one year and 43.75% if the benefit is paid for one and a half years. In case a parent who takes care of a child starts working, the contributory part of the benefit will be reduced to 30% (before October 1, 2014, the benefit was withdrawn fully). In the period when the child is 1.5 to 2 years old the total amount parents can receive is only EUR 43 per month.

Parents without social insurance are not eligible for maternity, paternity or parental benefit, but they can receive a childcare benefit of EUR 171 per month until the child turns 1.5 years and EUR 43 per month up to the age of 2 years.

²³ Eurostat database.

Maternity, paternity, parental and childcare benefits are state-funded. Persons who are on maternity, paternity or parental leave (until the child is 1.5 years old) are covered by mandatory social insurance contributions for old-age pensions.

Take-up rates²⁴ are likely to be high for maternity and parental benefits, but relatively low for paternity benefit. Precise non-take-up estimates are not available. The Ministry of Welfare provides a tentative estimate that only 38% of all fathers received paternity benefits in July 2012.²⁵

Given the demographic situation in Latvia, support of family and children became one of the central issues for policy makers. Maternity, paternity and parental benefits are always in the spotlight. These are one of the most generous benefits in the Latvian tax-benefit system and also the benefits which are most frequently reformed. In the last years the benefits became more generous and the possibility to extend the parental benefit up to 1.5 years has been introduced. In 2013, the ceilings imposed on maternity, paternity and parental benefits as part of austerity measures were raised upwards and as of 2015 the ceilings were completely removed.

One of the serious problems with maternity and parental leaves is the violation of mothers' rights to return to exactly the same employment conditions after the leave. The discrimination in this area is very difficult to prove. The Ombudsperson (2013) provides alarming survey-based statistics on the discrimination of mothers of newly born children returning from parental or maternity leave to their workplace.²⁶

2.4.2. Childcare

Provision of state financed childcare is one of the main measures envisaged by policy makers for the reconciliation of work and family life in Latvia.

Public childcare is organised by local governments. For children up to 6 years old, childcare is integrated within the preschool education system. Kindergartens or preschools are the major childcare facilities. At 7, children start basic education in schools. If schools have classes only for a part of a day, then the schools may also provide out-of-school childcare (subject to availability).

Local governments have different access to financial resources. This creates disparities in the quality and quantity in the provision of childcare facilities.

Public childcare is provided free of charge, parents have to pay for meals and sometimes for some extracurricular activities. These prices are usually quite low. However, some low-

²⁴ There is an application procedure for the benefits. One should submit certain documents to the State Social Insurance Agency. They check the entitlement, calculate the benefit and make the payment. Regarding maternity and paternity benefits/leaves, the take-up of leaves and take up of benefits go hand in hand. Regarding parental benefit in connection with the child care leave, the procedure is more complicated. The eligibility for leaves and for benefits are different. 1) Each employee has the right to childcare leave (see relevant paragraph). The duration is up to 18 months (before a child turns 8 years old). This is defined in the labour law. In principle, both parents can take this leave at the same time (or at different times). This is an individual right. 2) Once a person received a confirmation from the employer about the child care leave, he or she can apply for a parental benefit at the State Social Insurance Agency. However, only one of the parents is eligible for the benefit and the child should be strictly below 1 or 1.5 years old.

²⁵ Source: <http://www.lm.gov.lv/news/id/3847>. It is not clear if all fathers or only eligible fathers were considered for this estimate.

income families may not be able to afford it. In these cases it might be possible to apply for financial support from municipalities (but rules vary across municipalities).

According to the General Education Law, local governments are obliged to guarantee a place in a public kindergarten within the municipality for children aged 5 or more. For children from 1.5 to 4 years old, municipalities have to ensure equal access to pre-school institutions. Due to a shortage of kindergartens, there is a lack of childcare facilities for children below 4 years. This makes it difficult for parents to combine work and family life. Alternative childcare providers remain relatively rare.

Municipalities have to support out-of-school care to the extent of their capacity and financial resources but they are not obliged to guarantee it to all children. Many schools organise prolonged day-groups, however this is not mandatory (prices and availability vary). There are no official national statistics on the availability of out-of-school care. According to approximate estimates done by Rastrigina (2011), more than 70% of schools in 2004-2008 (and only 36% in 2009) organised special 'prolonged day groups' where children can stay after classes, prepare homework, and be involved in other activities. In 2004-2008, about 40% of children in primary education participated in prolonged day groups (only 15% in 2009).

In 2013, an additional budget of EUR 4 600 000 was allocated to improve the availability of pre-school childcare facilities. Since September 2013, local governments co-finance the cost of enrolment in private childcare facilities for children from 1.5 to 4 years old in case they are registered on the waiting list for public kindergarten but cannot get a place. The co-financed amount depends on the municipality and is equal to the average cost per child in public pre-school educational institutions in this municipality. The data on the number of children covered by this new policy has not been released yet.

In September 2013, a new regulation setting up softer criteria for private individuals and companies providing childcare services came into force. The revised criteria are expected to give more flexibility to childcare providers, and therefore contribute to solving or at least lessening the effect of the shortage of places in public kindergartens.

2.4.3. Flexible working time

According to the Labour law, the employer has to provide part-time work upon request for a full-time employee in the case of: pregnancy; in the period after childbirth; in the period of breastfeeding; and if that employee is the parent of a child below 14 years old. However, in practice, part-time work is relatively rare (for both men and women) as set out above. There are no special provisions regarding flexible work arrangements. This is subject to negotiations between the employee and the employer.

2.4.4. Care for elderly family members

There are no special provisions in the labour law for caring for elder dependents.

²⁶ European Commission (2012) offers an in depth analysis of the existing Latvian legislation and its gaps related to discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, maternity and parenthood.

2.5. Health and reproductive rights

KEY FINDINGS

- There is a big difference in life expectancy between women and men in Latvia.
- Men typically have less healthy lifestyles than women. Men are also more likely to die from external causes of death like suicides and traffic accidents.
- In 2009, Latvia launched public (gender-specific) cancer screening programmes.
- Infertility is considered to be a significant problem in the area of sexual and reproductive health. Since 2012, the state provides free of charge infertility treatment for women up to 37 years old.
- Abortion is available upon request during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Abortion rates are very high in Latvia. According to recent studies, knowledge about contraception is mediocre.
- The rate of caesarean sections is high and increased over the last five years. The indication to perform caesarean sections is often not justified. The Ministry of Health plans to develop stricter guidelines on this.
- There is no data on availability and use of epidural anaesthesia in Latvia.

The goal of a public health policy in Latvia is to prolong the healthy life years of the Latvian population and to prevent premature deaths, while maintaining, improving and restoring health. This policy goal is defined in the Public Health Strategy (2001) developed by the Ministry of Health.

According to the law, the state financed health care services are provided by the principle of equality to all Latvian residents, without providing a breakdown by gender, except for the specific gender differences related to the services (Ministry of Welfare, 2014).

2.5.1. Main health problems of men and women²⁷

There is a dramatic difference in life expectancy between women and men in Latvia. In 2012 the difference was 10 years, while in the EU-28 on average it was only slightly more than 5 years.²⁸ The difference occurs due to differences in lifestyles, use of healthcare and other health-related behaviour.

Men in Latvia typically have less healthy lifestyles than women. They more often use dependency inducing substances (e.g. smoking, alcohol, drugs) and have more risky behaviour. Men are almost four times more likely than women to die from external causes of death. These gender differences are in part associated with strong stereotypes about what 'masculinity' is.

²⁷ This section is based on the chapter „Women and Health” in report by the Ministry of Welfare (2014).

²⁸ Eurostat database.

Since 2008 the major category of external causes of death for men are suicides (especially for young men aged 25-34). Economic and financial difficulties combined with strong gender stereotypes (a man should be strong, provide for the family and 'never cry') provoke suicidal behaviour of men in crisis situations. Similar tendencies could be observed in the early 90s. For women such trend is not observed: the suicide rate is relatively stable over time. The second major group of external causes of death for men is traffic accidents.

The most prevalent cause of death for both men and women is cardiac and circulatory diseases. Malignancies are on the second place. The third most common cause of mortality is external causes of death (i.e. suicide, road accidents, drowning, murder, fatal accidents at the workplace, etc.)

Since 2009, the public cancer screening programme has been implemented. The screening programme includes a centrally organized cervical cancer preventive screening for women from 25-70 years (an invitation letter is sent every three years) and preventive breast cancer screening for women 50-69 years (an invitation letter is sent every two years). The preventive programme also includes bowel cancer preventive testing, for men and women aged 50 to 74 years, but not in a centralised way.

In 2012, the Ministry of Health and the National Health Service launched a social campaign "Check your health, the state will pay!" The campaign aims to increase citizens' awareness of the importance of preventive examinations.

The Ministry of Health claims that one of the most significant problems in the area of sexual and reproductive health is infertility (Ministry of Health, 2012). They argue that postponing a pregnancy, increased body weight and obesity, or sexually transmitted diseases could be among the factors stimulating infertility. While Latvia lacks good, systematically collected data on infertility incidence among the population which would allow comparisons with other Member States, the state provides free of charge infertility treatment for women up to 37 years old since 2012.

2.5.2. Abortion and birth control

The Sexual and Reproductive Health Law was adopted in 2002. The law determines the grounds for the termination of pregnancy. Abortion is available upon request during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. All women opting for abortion should sign the information sheet explaining the moral aspects of pregnancy termination, possible medical complications and possibilities to preserve the life of the baby-to-be. It also informs women on the nature of pregnancy termination. This brochure, however, doesn't provide information about family planning or women's rights (Putnina, 2008). The termination of a pregnancy may be performed not earlier than 72 hours after the issue of the pregnancy termination appointment.

Abortion rates are very high in Latvia even though continuously declining. In 2009 the number of abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age (15-49) was 16.8, while in 2012 it was 15.3. This is one of the highest abortion rates in the EU (Ministry of Welfare, 2014).²⁹

²⁹ Also the United Nations (2014) suggest that abortion rate in Latvia is quite high as well as maternal mortality.

The study by the University of Latvia (2013) breaks the stereotypes about the women who have abortions in Latvia. According to this study, 80% of the surveyed women who have had an abortion were in a stable relationship. The average age of women was 29. Only 10% of women had low income (less than 284 EUR per month). The study reveals that women's knowledge about contraception is mediocre, and does not depend on age, education level, and previous pregnancy experience.

Condoms, intrauterine devices and hormonal contraception are the most popular methods of contraception in Latvia. According to a survey carried out by Papardes zieds (2012), 22.7% of women have indicated that they are not able to afford contraceptives either frequently or sometimes. Hormonal contraception is used by 13% of women. About one in three sexually active women and one in four sexually active men use unsafe methods of contraception. 48% of women and 57% of men believe that hormonal contraception is harmful for health.

The Day-After-Pill is available in Latvian pharmacies and can be purchased without prescription.

2.5.3. Maternal health, caesarean sections, and epidural anaesthesia

In 2012, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Plan for Improvement of Mother's and Child's Health for 2012–2014 (Ministry of Health, 2012). This short-term policy planning document is developed in accordance with one of the sub-goals of the Public Health Strategy for 2011-2017, i.e. to improve maternal and child health and reduce infant mortality. This document mainly looks at woman's health as the means to ensure health of the newly born child and is not linked to the national gender equality plan ("Plan for Implementation of Gender Equality 2012-2014").

Similar to other EU countries, the rate of caesarean sections in Latvia increased over the last five years. Latvia has the highest rate of caesarean sections among the three Baltic States. However, the indicator is below the EU-27 average (Ministry of Health, 2012). One of the reasons for the increase in the proportion of caesarean section is the increasing age of mothers and more common chronic diseases.

The Ministry of Health prepared an informative report on caesarean sections and birth complications in Latvia. The report shows that often the indication to perform a caesarean is not justified. The report also points to other problems in the care of pregnant women. The Ministry plans to develop new guidelines for prenatal care and impose stricter indications for caesarean sections.³⁰

There is no data available on the use of epidural anaesthesia in Latvia. It is available in some hospitals but not free of charge. There is still limited knowledge on epidural anaesthesia among the public as well as among doctors. In some hospitals there is a suggestion to advise the use of epidural anaesthesia instead of caesarean sections (when the use of the latter is not justified).³¹

³⁰ <http://www.diena.lv/latvija/zinas/plano-noteikt-stingrakas-indikacijas-keizargrieziena-veiksmai-14044928>

³¹ The minutes of the Maternal and Child Health Advisory Council meeting (March 2014): http://www.vm.gov.lv/images/userfiles/mbves_kpad_sdes_protokols_050314.pdf

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Latvia is still in the early stage of developing its gender equality policy. There is a lot to be done before the policy becomes strong and consistent. Certain areas are developed better than others (e.g. the Labour Law).

Latvian women have a high participation rate in the labour market and a comparatively high participation rate in political and economic decision making. However, such issues as horizontal and vertical segregation in education and employment as well as the gender pay gap are not sufficiently addressed. Gender stereotypes still play an important role.

Reconciliation of work and family life proves to be difficult. Availability and quality of childcare are not well monitored. Demographic considerations (i.e. promotion of fertility) often take priority over gender equality considerations in the political discussion.

Some progress has been made recently in developing policy in the area of the eradication of gender based violence (especially, domestic violence). However, the policy fails to address all issues in this area in a comprehensive manner. Cooperation between responsible institutions is relatively weak.

Pronounced health differences are observed between women and men. Latvian men have worryingly low life expectancy due to unhealthy lifestyles and high suicide rate. In the area of sexual and reproductive health, high rate of abortions and caesarean sections point to the existence of important problems.

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Data sources:

- Database on women and men in decision-making: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/index_en.htm
- Eurostat database: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>
- Gender Equality Index: <http://eige.europa.eu/content/activities/gender-equality-index>

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