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**Gender Equality and Statistics in Estonia –
Developments during 10 Years of Independence**

Submitted by Statistical Office of Estonia¹

Contributed Paper

Introduction

The developments in gender equality in Estonia have been made possible due to the major economic and political change – gaining independence and starting transition to market economy. Women and men were *de jure* equal in Soviet Union but this equality was limited to political slogans and very little was done in practice to evaluate and improve gender equality.

Below we give a short overview of the policies, legal acts and initiatives of gender equality in Estonia. The second part of the paper summarises what has been done in the Estonian Statistical Office in the area of gender statistics: the surveys carried out and some results showing the changes in labour market, women's health, etc.

Short historical background about women's and men's equality in Estonia

The Estonian women's movement began in the 1880s when the first women's organisations were established. The Women's Union, founded in 1907, first started to publicly speak of women's rights, including equal pay for equal work. In 1911 the Association of Female Students was established. 1917 was the first Women Congress organised. The first Estonian Constitution already in 1920 provided women with the right to vote. Due to historical reason, from 1940 till the end of 1980, there is a gap several decades long in the normal activities and development of Estonian women's organisation. In the second half of the 1980s, women's organisations became once again more active and many organisations, which for years had not existed were re-established. The Women's Union of Estonia was recreated, as well as a number of other influential women's organisations. After the restoration of independence of Estonia in 1991, several new women's organisations were founded.

In 1996, subsequent to the Conference, an inter-ministerial committee for the promotion of gender equality was formed in order to review decisions adopted by the UN conferences on social issues. The inter-ministerial committee defined priority areas for Estonia with regard to gender equality as following:

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1. To create and strengthen national structure that would fulfil the function of integrating the principle of gender equality.
2. To analyse the conformity of Estonian legislation with international standards of gender equality.
3. To guarantee the availability of official gender-sensitive statistics.
4. To improve the situation of women in the labour market and to increase women's participation in decision-making.

In 1996 the Bureau of Equal Opportunities was established in the Ministry of Social Affairs. The main goal of this bureau is to introduce the principles of equality into the socio-political development of Estonia. In the first years of activity the bureau organized and initiated with several partners many projects inform the problem of gender inequality to the public, politicians, scientists and to members of civil society organizations.

In 1997 the conference "Equal Opportunities" took place in Tallinn, the same year that the bureau organized with the European Council a forum on the theme family planning and reproductive rights.

In January 1, 2002 the new Holiday Act entered into force. The father of a newborn child is entitled to child-care leave for 14 calendar days during the mother's pregnancy and maternity leave. The new Act also guarantees equal pay for the same work or work of equal value for both women and men.

The question of sex discrimination has started to gain more attention in recent years. In Estonia, there is no legal definition of either direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of sex. The Government decided after analysis of the situation during the years 1990-1995 that it was necessary to draft a special law concerning gender equality. The Ministry of Social Affairs prepared the draft *Gender Equality Act*.

When speaking about co-operation between Baltic Sea Countries, the Estonian Government expressed its will to organize the third Baltic Sea Women's Conference in the spring of 2003. The possibility to align this conference with the follow-up of the "Women and Democracy" conference in Reykjavik in 1999 and in Vilnius in 2001 has been under discussion.

The promotion of gender equality is based on extensive government and foreign-funded research of the economic and social situation of women and men like the regular Labour Market surveys; regular Hourly Wages of Women and Men surveys; quarterly Family Budget surveys; the first regular Time-Use surveys (2001); the Working Life Barometer surveys (1999); the Living Condition survey (1999); Estonian Families in the 1990s: Winners and Losers (1999); a representative survey of violence: Violence against Women: Attitudes and Stereotypes in Estonian Society (2001) and numerous others.

Gender statistics in the Statistical Office of Estonia

The Workshop on Gender Statistics in the Baltic States took place in Lithuania in 2000. The goal of this seminar was to elaborate gender statistics in Baltic States. The outputs were to publish gender statistics publications and to produce a gender statistics database. The themes were gender statistics and equality, the methodology of gender statistics. Each country made their own national plan to elaborate equality and gender statistics (2000-2005). The delegates of Estonia made the next plan:

1. To enhance the sensitivity of society concerning equality (to inform target groups of with the differences and problems concerning equality (especially politicians) and to analyse the present situation and identify the needs of information of target groups).
2. To elaborate gender statistics (to elaborate the cooperation of procurer-users, to define the responsibilities and functions of different institutions)

At the end of 2001, the first statistical book “Women and Men in 2001” was published by the Estonian Statistical Office. The data in this book is shown as easily as is possible for users who may not have much knowledge about statistics.

In the beginning of the year 2002 the Workshop on Gender Statistics took place in the Statistical Office of Estonia. This was the third time the Statistical Offices of Baltic States (Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia) and Sweden assembled to discuss to publish the booklet “Women and Men in Baltic States”. The booklet should be published in October 2002.

The Estonian Constitution and election laws provide equal rights to everyone, including the rights to run for presidency, to elect and to be elected on municipal and state levels.

It proceeds from the principle that gender equality is based on economic self-sufficiency of individuals. One of the biggest problems on gender equality is the inequality of women and men in the labour market. To illustrate the situation in Estonia I give you some facts about gender statistics and equality in Estonia.

Labour market in 1989-2001, women & men

Source: Labour Force Survey Data

During the period of 1989-2001 the labour force (employed and unemployed) aged 15-64 has constantly decreased and inactive population increased (slide 1). In 2001 there was 177 thousand (or 22% -points) economically active persons less than in 1989. The *dependency rate* (the ratio between the inactive and active population) shows the demand for family or welfare state arrangements to finance the material living conditions of the inactive. Higher dependency rates demand elaborated transfer systems (old age pensions, unemployment allowances, training programs etc.) and/or family arrangements. The indicator within the age group of 15-64 has risen from 27% in 1989 to 43% in 2001.

Reasons for inactivity and main sources of income

In 2000 the main reason for inactivity of people aged 15-24 was education (83%) and their main source of subsistence was the income of spouse, parent and/or relatives (85%). For people aged 25-49 the main reason for inactivity was illness or disability (32%), other important reasons were pregnancy or maternity leave (22%), the need to take care of children or other members of family (18%), or loss of hope to find work (18%). Their main source of subsistence was also income of spouse, parent and/or relatives (56%), but also pensions (23%) and child or subsistence allowances (13%).

For people aged 50-69 the main reason for inactivity was retirement age (77%), also persons own illness or disability (15%). Their main sources of income were pension (86%), and income of spouse, parent and/or relatives (12%).

We can conclude that in 2000 people aged 50-69 relied on welfare state arrangements the inactive people aged 15-49 relied mainly on family arrangements.

Participation rates

The participation rate of women aged 15-64 has been about 10% -points lower than the participation rate of men (slide 2). The lowest participation rate of women compared to men is in the age group 55-64 (slide 3). For every 10 active men there are about 6 active women. This is mainly due to the fact that women's retirement age is earlier than men's.

In the age group 15-24 the participation rate of women compared to men fell during 1989 to 1992 and has stayed at this level until 2001. From 1992 there were about 7 active women for every 10 active men.

In the best working age group of 25-54 there were 9 active women for every 10 active men.

Unemployment rates

The unemployment rate of women and men rose from 2% to 12% level from 1991 to 2001. Women's unemployment rate has been lower than men's since 1995.

Employment in sectors of economy

The proportion of women working in a tertiary sector is 60% and it has been stable during 1989-2001 (slide 5). The share of women in a secondary sector was more than 40% in 1989, by 2001 it has decreased to 35%. The share of women in a primary sector has been lowest in this period – 34% in 1989 and 28% in 2001.

The health of Estonian women and children have improved significantly not only because of better-quality medical care but also because of the reason that women take better care of themselves during pregnancy. One of the reasons is that information concerning reproductive health has become more available, especially through Internet.

Although the number of abortions is still high, in the year 2000 the number of abortions was smaller than the number of births, 98 abortions to 100 births. In the last 8 years the number of abortions per 1000 fertility age females dropped from 70 to 37.

Speaking about family-life it has to be mentioned that the rights and benefit related to raising children have significantly changed and are now equally addressed towards mothers and fathers.

People raising a child under three years of age are insured in accordance with the Health Insurance Act. It means that social benefits are paid to the person actually raising the child. This person might not be the mother.

Parents with 7-year-old children are entitled to a paid holiday at the time suitable for them and parents with 7-10 years old children are entitled to a holiday during school vacation upon their request.

Prevailing legislation cannot implement demand of gender equality de jure. Articles about women and men equality are too general and incomplete. The fundamental concepts aren't defined and there is no suitable legal practise in that area.

Issues concerning the promotion of gender equality are not only in the competence of the Ministry of Social Affairs, but also in various interdisciplinary sectors of other ministries. According to the Government of the Republic Amendment Act, the promotion of gender equality is under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The next steps

The National Action Plan:

In the year 2000 the Objectives for the year 2003 were made:

- implementation of the Gender Equality Act
- formation of specific specialities for solving cases of sexual discrimination
- an elaborated strategy and methods for integrating the principle of equality in labour and social welfare sectors

- labour sector: decreased vertical and horizontal segregation in the labour market, balanced division of duties at work and at home, an established structure for supporting the entrepreneurship of women by elaborating relevant legal basis and raising the awareness of people
- health sector: the protection of reproductive health through efficient programmes and awareness-raising activities
- social sector: targeted programmes of poverty alleviation and the prevention of poverty of men and women

In order to achieve the objectives it is necessary to

- work out the Gender Equality Act, and amend existing legislation
- work out gender equality strategy
- train specialists on equal opportunities issues
- raise public awareness of gender equality issues

Estonia has made remarkable progress at the national level by improving existing legislation. The efforts are gained thanks to good cooperation between the Government and the NGOs. Especially productive has been the cooperation in research centres.

Booklets and publications about gender equality principles and foster methods are continually published in Estonia. We hope that in the second reading of the draft the Gender Equality Act will be adopted.