

National Report of the Republic of Latvia on the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action

Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia

2024

List of abbreviations

CSB – Central Statistical Bureau

EEA – European Economic Area

EIGE – European Institute for Gender Equality

EU – European Union

FEAD – Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

MoC- Ministry of Culture

MoD – Ministry of Defence

MoES – Ministry of Education and Science

MoEPRG – Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development

MoF – Ministry of Finance

MoFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoH – Ministry of Health

MoI – Ministry of Interior

MoJ – Ministry of Justice

MoW – Ministry of Welfare

NGO – Non-governmental organisation

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

SEA – State Employment Agency

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Section I: Highlights

In recent years, Latvia has worked towards active promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and for men. The biggest changes and achievements were seen in the area of fighting gender-based and domestic violence, as well as promotion of work-life balance for women and men.

When it comes to evaluating past achievements and positive developments in ensuring women's equal rights and opportunities, these are some of the main highlights:

- In recent years, significant changes have been made in Latvian legislation to reduce domestic violence and gender-based violence, as well as new services for victims of domestic violence have been developed. During the reporting period, Latvia has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.
- Latvia has worked towards fostering work life balance for parents and carers by introducing changes in legislation to extend paternity leave, introduce carer's leave and a two-month non-transferable period of parental leave for each parent.
- In order to reduce poverty, especially women's poverty, the implementation of the minimum income reform was launched in 2020 with the aim of determining methodologically sound minimum income level that corresponds to actual socio-economic situation, thus striving to achieve more adequate minimum benefits and pensions.
- There is a high level of women who have attained higher education and the level of economic activity and employment of women is gradually increasing.

Although there has been significant progress in some areas of gender equality policy, some important challenges still remain:

- There is a significant horizontal gender-based segregation in labour market and education, which in turn impacts Latvia's gender-pay gap indicator, which is one of the highest in the EU.
- A significant challenge is a lack of regular funding for gender equality policy and poor understanding of gender mainstreaming issues in other line ministries and state agencies when it comes to policy planning and implementation, especially in areas which are not obviously related to gender equality and other social issues, for example, finance, climate, energy, agriculture.
- There are still deep rooted and prevailing stereotypes in Latvian society about gender roles and concept of gender-equality, which influence various aspects of women's and men's lives, for example, their career and educational choices, health outcomes, their work-life balance and burden of unpaid care work, prevalence of gender-based and domestic violence, etc.

- The ageing of society, transformation of labour market, demand for short-term and long-term care services for children and adults have also impacted gender equality policy.

Details of the policy framework and progress regarding above mentioned aspects are provided in Section 2 and 3 of this report.

Section II: Priorities, achievements, challenges, setbacks and promising future practices

Equal rights and opportunities for women and men are a fundamental human right, which is stipulated by Article 91 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (*Satversme*): “all human beings in Latvia shall be equal before the law and the courts. Human rights shall be realised without discrimination of any kind”. Latvia has also joined several international documents relating to human rights and gender equality, confirming its readiness as a democratic country to respect and adhere to the said principles. Additionally, the laws of various sectors regulate prohibition of different treatment or discrimination based on gender, for example, Labour Law [*Darba likums*], the Education Law [*Izglītības likums*], Law on Social Security [*Par sociālo drošību*], Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment Law [*Bezdarbnieku un darba meklētāju atbalsta likums*], Youth Law [*Jaunatnes likums*], Sports Law [*Sporta likums*], the Law on Scientific Activities [*Zinātniskās darbības likums*], Law on Judicial Power [*Par tiesu varu*], the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination against Natural Persons Who Perform Economic Activities [*Fizisko personu, kuras veic saimniecisko darbību, diskriminācijas aizlieguma likums*], the Administrative Procedure Law [*Administratīvā procesa likums*], etc.

Latvia has chosen an integrated policy planning approach to gender equality, which means that the principle of gender equality should be mainstreamed in all sectoral policies (defence, foreign affairs, economics, finance, internal affairs, education and science, culture, welfare, transportation, justice, health, environment and regional development and agriculture). The Ministry of Welfare [*Labklājības ministrija*] (hereinafter – MoW) is the responsible ministry for the development of an integrated approach to gender equality issues.

Since 2020, many significant changes have been implemented in the context of gender equality policy, especially when it comes to fighting gender-based and domestic violence, but still several important challenges remain. The last five years have also brought significant overall challenges that have impacted gender equality and social policy, for example, Covid-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis and Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.

The main planning document for gender equality policy in this time period was the Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2021 – 2023¹. The aim of the plan was to ensure an integrated, targeted and effective policy that promotes equal rights and opportunities for women and men. To achieve this goal, three directions of action were set: (1) equal rights and

¹ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/325509-par-planu-sieviesu-un-viriesu-vienlidzigu-tiesibu-un-iespeju-veicinasanai-20212023-gadam>

opportunities for women and men in the labour market and education; (2) prevention of domestic violence and gender-based violence; (3) strengthening gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies.

Regarding activities to promote equal rights and opportunities for women and men, the main focus was on activities to foster work-life balance, fight discrimination within the labour market, reduce stereotypes about career and educational choices for young people, as well as inform policy makers, employers and employees about pay transparency issues and foster inclusive employment environment.

In the area of prevention of domestic violence and gender-based violence the main focus was on the prevention work, especially with young people. MoW, together with various NGOs, organised awareness raising activities about various types of gender-based and domestic violence, as well as discussion workshops for young people on how to build non-violent relationships based on gender equality and free of harmful stereotypes.

When it comes to strengthening gender mainstreaming in sector policies, the activities were focused on capacity building, including gender equality in ex ante evaluations of legal acts and dissemination of information about gender mainstreaming in such sectors as social work and justice. Unfortunately, the achievement of this priority is still one of the main challenges in Latvia when it comes to full gender equality mainstreaming in all sectoral policies and the introduction of gender budgeting. Nevertheless, a more active gender mainstreaming approach was implemented within the context of planning, implementation and evaluation of EU structural fund programmes and projects. MoW is the responsible institution for the implementation of the non-discrimination as a horizontal principle in EU funded activities and it ensures methodological guidance on these issues, including on gender equality mainstreaming.

Gender equality was also included as one of the guiding principles in the Strategy on Social Protection and Labour Market Policy 2021-2027², which was developed by MoW. The strategy states that ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men is an essential prerequisite for promoting sustainable economic and social development of the society. Policy planning in this area should take into account the fact that the socio-economic situation of women and men tends to be different. Given the importance of the principle of equal rights and opportunities in every policy sector, it is essential to promote gender mainstreaming in policy planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. For the development of the integrated approach, it is necessary to develop the knowledge of public administration, as well as public awareness of the benefits of updating and strengthening the principle of equality.

Against this backdrop, the main achievements in this time period were the improvement of approach to fight and prevent gender-based and domestic violence, fostering of work-life balance policies, fighting poverty, as well as work with employers and employees towards a more inclusive labour market in Latvia. NGOs and mutual cooperation with relevant stakeholders played an important role towards the achievement of these goals.

² <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/325828-par-socialas-aizsardzibas-un-darba-tirgus-politikas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-gadam>

Fight against gender-based and domestic violence has always been one of the main priorities in Latvia when it comes to gender equality and family policy. Gender-based and domestic violence is a serious human rights violation that brings harm and seriously impacts women's and girls' lives in all of their aspects.

As a 2021 survey from the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) shows³ – every fourth woman (25.1%) in Latvia aged 18-74 has experienced physical or sexual violence. The survey data also showed that every third (30.1%) woman in Latvia has experienced psychological, physical or sexual violence or a combination of several forms of violence while being in a relationship. This data shows that the prevalence of gender-based and domestic violence in Latvia is still high and that the overall tolerance towards violence in society is quite high.

In recent years, Latvia has prioritised fighting against gender-based and domestic violence to minimise its prevalence in the society and strengthen the support for victims of gender-based and domestic violence. In November 2023, the Latvian parliament ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. On May 1, 2024, the Convention entered into force officially.

Additionally, since 2019, Latvia has continued to strengthen normative, legal and policy framework to prevent and fight gender-based and domestic violence. For example, in 2021, Latvian Parliament supported amendments to the Law “On Police”⁴, which stipulates that the police officer is able to decide to separate a person who poses a threat for a victim without a written application from the victim. This is just one of many amendments of the Latvian legislation in the reporting period, which seeks to strengthen the response to the cases of domestic and gender-based violence.

Latvia has also improved services for victims of violence by providing a new service of crisis apartments since July 2023 and has continued to work with perpetrators of domestic and gender-based violence by providing rehabilitation programmes for persons who have been violent.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought different challenges in the area of gender equality and highlighted the fact that women often are the ones that bear the brunt of unpaid care work at home while trying to manage work obligations. During the Covid-19 pandemic, 33.7% of women and 20.3% of men in Latvia pointed to the lack of balance between work and private life, along with the increase in workload in performing household duties when working remotely, especially in cases where there are children under the age of 18 living in the household. 31.8% of women and only 19.4% of men reported additional household responsibilities during the Covid-19 pandemic and overall, 48.5% of women indicated an increase of their workload.⁵

Equal distribution of unpaid care work and promotion of work-life balance is crucial to ensure women's full participation in labour market, therefore, to foster father's involvement in child care and foster work-life balance of carers, since August 2022, Latvia has extended paternity leave from 10

³ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/population/crimes/publications-and-infographics/10940-prevalence-violence-2021>

⁴ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/67957-on-police>

⁵ https://www.rsu.lv/sites/default/files/imce/Projekti/VPP_COVID/29_zinojums_21022021_final_c.pdf

calendar days to 10 working days and introduced carer's leave. Additionally, starting from January 1, 2023, Latvia has introduced a non-transferable 2-month period of parental leave for each parent. Latvia also has continued to implement various awareness raising campaigns about men's involvement in child care and unpaid domestic work and significant investments have been made to foster availability of childcare and early childhood education services.

Development of inclusive employment and working environments is also crucial to boost women's economic empowerment. Since 2020, Latvia has actively worked with employers and the private sector to raise awareness about inclusive and diverse work environments, highlighting good practices. For example, with the aim of promoting a strategic approach to the development of an inclusive and diverse work environment, Society Integration Foundation of Latvia launched an initiative in 2023 to support Latvian employers – the Diversity Mentor Programme. The Participants of the programme had the opportunity not only to expand their knowledge about diversity, but also to create a specific solution for their workplace, for example, to create and define their diversity and inclusion strategy or to develop an internal training programme. The participants were able to cooperate with experienced experts, as well as representatives of other organisations and other participants of the programme.

Reduction of poverty, especially women's poverty, has also been high on social policy agenda. Data from the 2023 Gender Equality Index done by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) shows a worrying trend where women are more at risk of poverty than men. The risk of poverty is particularly high for older women and women with disabilities.⁶

In order to reduce poverty, especially women's poverty, the implementation of the minimum income reform was launched in 2020 with the aim of determining a methodologically sound minimum income level that corresponds to relevant socio-economic situations. The reform was completed in July 2023, when the amendments to the Law "On Social Security"⁷ entered into force, providing that the minimum income thresholds will be revised on January 1 of each year. As a result of the reform the following social transfers were changed: guaranteed minimum income benefit, housing benefit, state social security benefit, minimum old-age, disability and survivor pensions and allowances for orphans.

Even though there have been significant achievements and developments in the area of gender equality, several significant challenges still remain. As mentioned before, one of the main obstacles to successfully advance gender equality issues in all policy areas is a lack of regular funding for gender equality policy and poor understanding of gender mainstreaming in line ministries and state agencies when it comes to policy planning and implementation, especially in areas which are not obviously related to gender equality and social issues, for example, finance, climate, energy, agriculture, etc.

The main challenges for successfully integrating the principle of gender equality in policy planning processes in Latvia are: (1) lack of regular and systematic training of employees of ministries and

⁶ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/country/LV>

⁷ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/36850-on-social-security>

other state administrative institutions on gender mainstreaming; (2) availability of methodological and consultative support for integrating the principles of equal rights and opportunities for women and men in policy and budget planning; (3) inclusion of the principle of gender equality as a horizontal consideration in all policy areas and gender budgeting.

Recent global challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, which was driven by high energy costs as a consequence of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, highlighted income inequality, especially the gender pay gap and the vertical and horizontal segregation of the labour market.

The gender pay gap in Latvia is particularly high – in 2022 women's average gross hourly earnings were 17.1% lower than men's.⁸ For every euro earned by a man, a woman in Latvia receives only 83 cents. This difference is especially pronounced between men and women at the age of 35-44, as well as for 25–35-year-olds. It is also important to note that closing the gender pay gap plays a crucial role in closing the pension gap. In 2022, the pension gap in Latvia was 11.3%.⁹ Therefore, the reduction of the gender pay gap will also play a crucial role in eradicating women's poverty.

The gender pay gap in Latvia is mostly created by a segregated labour market and educational system. There is a pronounced gender segregation related to gender stereotypes in the Latvian education sector. According to the 2023 data of the European Gender Equality Index, Latvia has one of the biggest divides between men and women in humanities and STEM fields in the EU. Women most often choose to continue their education in such sectors as education, health, welfare, arts and humanities. According to national data, in 2022, only third (29.9%) of graduates in STEM fields were women.¹⁰

This segregation also continues in the labour market. The most common sectors in which men are employed in Latvia are transportation, construction, logistics and ICT, while women are usually employed in service, care and education sectors. The largest proportion of women is in the health and social care sector (85.6%), while the largest proportion of men is in construction (91%).¹¹

All the above-mentioned challenges – gender-based and domestic violence, gender pay gap, segregation of labour market and educational system stems from deep-rooted gender stereotypes that are still present in Latvian society. According to the 2024 private study “Novatore Baltic Gender Equality Barometer 2024”¹², gender stereotypes about gender roles are still widespread in Latvian society. For example, women in Latvian society are still seen as the primary caretakers of children and household and there is a widespread view that women should dedicate more of their time to

⁸ <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/labklajibas-un-vienlidzibas-raditaji/dzimumlidztiesiba/6300-dzimumu-lidztiesiba?themeCode=GE>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/labklajibas-un-vienlidzibas-raditaji/dzimumlidztiesiba/6301-dzimumu-lidztiesiba?themeCode=GE>

¹¹ <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/labklajibas-un-vienlidzibas-raditaji/dzimumlidztiesiba/6300-dzimumu-lidztiesiba?themeCode=GE>

¹² <https://www.dazadiba.lv/resources/novatore-dzimumu-lidztiesibas-barometrs/>

childcare. There is also a prevailing opinion that a man should be the primary breadwinner in a relationship and that a man should receive more money than his partner.

Not only the Covid-19 pandemic, but also Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine impacted gender equality policy in Latvia and made policy makers and partners from NGOs to think about new ways how to protect refugee women and girls from human trafficking, as well as fostered a discussion on the availability of sexual and reproductive health services for women affected by conflict related sexual violence. For example, in order to support Ukrainian women and girls who have suffered from sexual violence, in April 2022, Latvian parliament supported an amendment to the Law on the Support of Ukrainian Civilians¹³, which stipulated that Ukrainian women and girls fleeing the war will have the right to receive state paid termination of pregnancy and other related sexual and reproductive health services.

To tackle various challenges that still remain in the area of gender equality, MoW is working on its next Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-2027. The aim of the plan is to continue to ensure an integrated, targeted and effective policy that promotes equal rights and opportunities for women and men. To achieve this goal, three directions of action are set: (1) promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men in education and labour market; (2) reduction of negative gender stereotypes and (3) integration of the principle of gender equality in the policy planning process. Currently, it is planned that this document will be approved by the government in June.

To fight the gender pay gap, by June 7, 2026, Latvia will transpose EU Directive 2023/970 on strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms. Additionally, through the support of EU funding, MoW is planning a pilot project for Latvian enterprises on how to best incorporate pay transparency mechanisms to reduce gender-pay gap, as well as informative and awareness raising activities for employers and employees about this topic.

To further fight gender pay gap and vertical segregation and to foster women's empowerment and leadership, MoW is also working on the transposition of the EU Directive 2022/2381 on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies and related measures. It will set in place a mechanism to ensure gender-balanced executive and non-executive boards of publicly listed companies.

In order to further promote gender mainstreaming in all policy areas, through the support of EU funding, MoW is developing a training programme for civil servants and public officials of local governments to enhance their capacity to integrate equal opportunities and non-discrimination principles into policy planning, implementation and evaluation processes. One of the training modules in this programme will be dedicated to gender equality issues and best practices of gender mainstreaming and gender-budgeting. This activity will be done within the new programming period for EU Funds 2021-2027 and it will be implemented from 2024 till 2029.

¹³ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/331862-grozijums-ukrainas-civiliedzivotaju-atbalsta-likuma>

Promotion of gender equality and fight against harmful gender stereotypes cannot be imagined without inclusion of boys and men in gender equality policy. Because of the growing backlash against gender equality and feminist movements, the inclusion of men and boys in gender equality has become even more crucial. When involving boys and men in the discussion of equal rights, it is necessary to focus on the gender equality as a positive benefit for whole society, which also contributes to the well-being of boys and men, as well as on the specific problems and stereotypes of men and boys, which can negatively impact them and also indirectly women and girls, for example, poor health and mental health outcomes, as well as backlash against caring masculinities. The next Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-2027 will contain activities that will focus on these issues.

The fight against gender based and domestic violence will continue to be one of the top priorities when it comes to advancing women's and girls' rights. To better coordinate efforts of all involved stakeholders in the fight against gender based and domestic violence, Latvia is currently working on the development of its first National Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029. The Plan will have 4 directions of action: (1) prevention of violence against women and domestic violence; (2) provision and improvement of support measures for victims of violence; (3) strengthening the responsibility of perpetrators and provision of rehabilitation services to reduce violent behaviour; (4) establishment of a unified and coordinated policy to combat and prevent violence against women and domestic violence.

Details of the policy framework and progress regarding above mentioned and other gender equality aspects are provided in Section 3 of this report.

Section III: Progress across 12 critical areas of concern since 2020

Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

Over the last ten years, there has been a steady upward trend in both male and female employment rates, but the Covid-19 pandemic has slowed down this growth. In 2019, 65% of the population aged 15-74 were employed, but as a result of the pandemic and various restrictions imposed, several economic sectors were seriously affected and the number of employees in Latvia decreased. From 2022, the economic situation began to improve and the number of employed persons increased by 22.2 thousand. Although the number of employed persons in 2023 slightly decreased, the total employment rate has increased by 0.3%.¹⁴

Nevertheless, there is still a gap between women's and men's employment rates in Latvia. In 2023, the employment rate for men was 67.1% and for women – 61.6%.¹⁵ At the EU level, the rate of women's participation in the labour market is quite high – according to 2023 data of European Gender Equality Index Latvia ranks 7th in the EU in the sub-domain in labour market participation.¹⁶

When it comes to the unemployment rate – it is lower for women than for men. For example, in 2023 the unemployment rate for women was 5.4%, but for men – 7.6%.¹⁷ In general, there has always been a tendency for men to have a higher unemployment rate, while women are more often economically inactive – thus neither employed or unemployed. Men are also more likely than women to work in occupations and sectors which are more exposed to downsizing.

Women in Latvia more often than men also choose part-time work. In 2023, 10.1% of women worked part-time (less than 40 hours a week) and only 5.5% of men had the same working hours. Such working hours are not always the employee's own choice – the survey data shows that the main reason for working part-time is family circumstances (26.3% of men and 26.6% of women cited this as the reason for part-time employment) or an inability to find a full-time employment (21.4% of men and 25.5% of women cited this a reason for part-time employment)¹⁸.

One of the biggest challenges when it comes to gender equality and employment in Latvia is the vertical and horizontal segregation of the labour market which stems from deeply ingrained gender stereotypes in education and society as a whole. According to national data, the most common sectors

¹⁴ https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2024-05/Nr_09_Darbaspeka_apsekojuma_galvenie_raditaji_2023_gada_%2824_00%29_LV.pdf

¹⁵ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/labour-market/employment/10235-employment>

¹⁶ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/LV>

¹⁷ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/labour-market/unemployment/4419-unemployment-rate>

¹⁸ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6300-gender-equality>

in which men in Latvia are employed are transportation, industry, logistics, information and communication technologies, construction. Meanwhile, women are mostly employed in such sectors as care, education and various service-related industries. The largest proportion of women are employed in the health and social sector (85.6%), while the largest proportion of men are employed in construction (91%).¹⁹ In addition to this horizontal segregation, vertical segregation can also be observed in Latvian labour market – women are less likely to hold high decision-making positions and are less likely to be involved in politics.

Nevertheless, compared to the EU average level, Latvia is in the leading positions in terms of the proportion of women in managerial positions. In 2022, 56.1% of managers were women. Although this indicator is relatively high, this representation is not equal in all sectors. For example, there are only 23.3% of women on the boards of Latvia's largest companies.²⁰

Both horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market contributes to gender pay gap. In 2022, women's average gross hourly earnings were by 17.1% lower than men's. This difference was especially pronounced between men and women in the age group of 35-44, as well as 25-35. The biggest pay gap was in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector (37.2%), as well as information and communication technology services sector (34%). The only industry where women's wages are higher than men's is the electricity, gas supply, heating and air condition industries – in 2022, women's wages in these industries were 6.1% higher than men's.²¹

Opportunities to reconcile work and private life play a significant role in reducing inequality in the labour market. In Latvia, there are still significant differences between women and men when it comes to participation in unpaid care work, which can create obstacles to women's full participation in the labour market, as well as their possibilities to balance work and private life. According to the 2023 data of the European Gender Equality Index, in the period from 2016 to 2022, there is a growing gender inequality in Latvia in the involvement of men in care and housework. For example, 73% of women in Latvia between the ages of 18 and 74 report that they do housework and cook every day, while only 35% of men do these same activities every day. Men are also less actively involved in child care in Latvia – in 2023, 83% of the recipients of parental benefits were women and only 17% were men. Additionally, pronounced gender differences can be observed among persons who have been appointed as guardians for persons with mental or other health disorders – in 2022, 83.3% of guardians were women. This shows that most of the care burden in Latvia is placed on women.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted and deepened these existing problems in the labour market and reconciliation of work and private life for women. During the state of emergency in the spring of 2020, the lockdowns particularly affected tourism, accommodation and catering services; wholesale and retail sectors, as well as arts, entertainment and leisure industries. At the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, the beauty industry was particularly affected, where women are mostly employed.

As one of the main forms of support for improving the situation of employees and self-employed persons, the Latvian government introduced idle time allowance. At the beginning of May 2020, the

¹⁹ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6300-gender-equality>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

State Revenue Service published the portrait of the average recipient of this allowance – a young woman from Riga (capital of Latvia), aged between 26 and 35, who in the last three years has worked in the service industry and has received a salary lower than 80% of the average salary in Latvia. In general, women applied for unemployment benefits almost twice as often as men. Analysing the 10% of recipients of idle time allowance, who have received the lowest allowances, 66% of them were women. This reflects the problem of gender pay gap and segregated labour market in Latvia.

Women also bore the brunt of care work and child care during the Covid -19 pandemic while trying to balance their private and work life. According to the research data, the group of employees who were most negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic were women under the age of 44 and whose household has children under the age of 18. One third of the employees, mostly women, needed to make changes in their working arrangements, and women indicated 2.5 times more than men that during the state of emergency they needed to work full time and take care of the children and household work at the same time, while their workplace did not provide adequate solutions for reconciling work and family life.²²

Additionally, one of the studies concluded that before the Covid-19 pandemic remote work was mostly done by men. Therefore, when the pandemic started, women were the ones that had to adapt to the rapid changes and start working remotely. Women (44.1%) two times more often than men (20.3%) stated that they felt anxiety related to the new working environment and the balancing of work and private life.²³

When it comes to advancement of equality in the world of work, promotion of employment and unemployment protection schemes, Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment Law²⁴ stipulates that, when implementing active employment reduction measures, differential treatment based on a person's sex is prohibited. The State Employment Agency (hereinafter- SEA) offers its support measures to all unemployed taking into account their preferences, skills, previous work experience and education, as well as specific eligibility criteria and needs, regardless of person's sex. Women tend to register more actively than men with SEA, thus applying more actively for training and other active labour market support policies.

Regarding services available for unemployed women, currently, the following are available (regardless of the person's sex): participation in short and longer-term training measures to acquire skills, competences and professions demanded on the labour market, including ICT and language training on different levels; subsidised employment measures provided by companies (work contract from the first day of participation); support measures for the unemployed with addiction problems; regional mobility support for covering transportation costs or living costs; psychological support (both in groups and individual).

²² <https://science.rsu.lv/en/publications/zi%C5%86ojums-par-da%C5%BE%C4%81du-soci%C4%81li-demogr%C4%81fisko-grupu-darba-un-priv%C4%81t%C4%81s->

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/62539-support-for-unemployed-persons-and-persons-seeking-employment-law>

There is a wide range of upskilling and reskilling support available for clients registered in the SEA and the SEA has also started to service a new target group – those at risk of unemployment.

To promote entrepreneurship, SEA has activities that facilitate business and self-employment start-ups, which are aimed at providing consultative and financial support to unemployed persons with the business skills and motivation to start business activities or self-employment and successfully work in the chosen field at least for 2 years. The measure includes consultations on developing and implementing a business plan, business grant up to 5000 EUR depending on the approved budget estimate, monthly subsidies for the first six months of business plan implementation in the amount of 750 EUR, funding for the adaptation of the place of implementation of the business plan up to 1000 EUR, if the person has a disability and other support. There is a higher proportion of women among the participants of this activity (see table below). Every year, an average of 50 business plans receive a positive evaluation by experts and are directed to their implementation.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Overall participants	156	158	160	157	397
Women	107	106	115	114	261
Men	49	52	45	43	136

To close the digital divide between women and men, in 2020 – 2022, Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association (LIKTA) in cooperation with SEA implemented a project „Women4IT”²⁵ consisting of a training programme where young women aged 18 to 29, who at that time were neither working nor studying, had the opportunity to learn one of six areas of digital work and receive support for career development. The aim of the project was to increase the number of girls and young women in the digital sector by developing digital competence of young women who were at risk of being excluded from the labour market, thereby improving their employability and reducing the shortage of ICT professionals in Europe. The project was developed through training, mentoring and empowerment workshops. The project was financed from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment.

As a result of the project, 177 young women have completed the training program in Latvia, while 65% of the participants had found a digital job in IT or other sectors within 3 months after completing the training. The project created attractive employment opportunities for young people in the digital economy and developed digital competence among young women. The project also facilitated a supportive environment where young women could feel safe and open to educational opportunities and challenges, and helped them learn and discover new career paths. The participants highly appreciated the availability of the mentor and the learning environment where it was possible to ask questions, as well as the community and new contacts that arose as a result of the training program.

²⁵ <https://likta.lv/women4it/>

Inclusion of women and girls in the digital development is also mainstreamed in the national Strategy on Digital Transformation 2021 – 2027²⁶. This Strategy is a medium-term policy planning document, which determines the digital transformation policy (development of information society) in Latvia. The Strategy is built upon the settings, directions of action and objectives in the digital transformation policy which have been approved in the National Development Plan for 2021 - 2027.

The Strategy determines a common policy for the digital development of public administration, national economy and society. It provides a possibility for any inhabitant to acquire the necessary skills in any stage of life according to their needs.

The Strategy does not identify specific target groups but focuses on the digital development of the entire society. However, certain action directions specify the necessary activities, highlighting the roles of women and girls:

4.1.1. Direction of action: The development of the digital skills of society in the educational process:

Necessary action: 3. Promote the involvement of children and youth, including girls, in ICT-related professions, including through career education and providing career development support, such as informational campaigns, summer ICT camps, exploring ICT-related professions, among other activities, especially emphasising gender equality in ICT career choices.

4.1.2. Direction of action: Developing society's digital skills from basic skills to high-level skills:

Necessary action: 9. Promote the acquisition of digital skills among girls and women to increase their choice of education and job opportunities related to digital technology.

Expected result: 7. Raising girls' and women's awareness of opportunities to acquire digital skills and basic digital skills as a basis for more women to choose digital-related education, work, or retraining.

To support these directions of action and reduce the gender digital divide, a project "Development of Digital skills of society" has been developed. The aim is to promote the development of digital self-service skills, thus promoting better integration of persons into society, including employment, solving everyday issues and improving the quality of life.

The target groups of the project are young people (aged between 13 and 25 years), adults (aged between 26 and 65 years) without digital skills or with low level of digital skills, seniors (aged over 65 years), persons with special needs and persons at risk of social exclusion.²⁷

Digital transformation is also included as a cross-cutting priority in the Strategy on Education Development 2021-2027²⁸, emphasising the added value of the opportunities provided by technology and digitalisation for the educational content and process, the learning environment and the

²⁶ <https://digitalanedela.lv/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Latvijas-Digit%C4%81l%C4%81s-Transform%C4%81cijas-pamatnost%C4%81dnes-2021-2027.pdf>

²⁷ The indicator to be achieved in the project is that at least 40 000 Latvian residents have raised their digital self-service skills by 30 April 2026. Project budget: EUR 9 380 564.24 (Recovery Fund financing - EUR 9 042 000.00, State budget financing - EUR 338 564.24).

²⁸ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324332-par-izglitiba-attistiba-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam>

management of education. The overarching goal of education development for 2021-2027 is to provide quality education opportunities for all in order to promote the development and realisation of each person's potential throughout life and to build society's ability to change and responsibly manage constant changes in the society and economy. The specific target regarding digital skills is to ensure that at least 70% of adults have at least basic digital skills by the end of 2027. It also emphasises the need to promote the use of digital learning platforms in all education levels.

As women and girls are not sufficiently represented in technical and digital professions because of stereotypes, lack of role models and inclusive policies, there is a need for programmes that are made specifically for girls and women. NGO Riga Tech Girls initiative is a good practice example in Latvia in this area.²⁹ It is the first community in Latvia dedicated to educating and inspiring girls and women about technology. The courses give women and girls an opportunity to start their career in tech, build their start-ups and improve their digital skills. In 2023, Riga Tech Girls educational program "Get to know the technologies" was already running for the fourth year. Riga Tech Girls has hosted tens of programs, with more than 22,000 individuals passed through to improve their tech skills. Riga Tech Girls has also launched its first program that is available to anyone internationally.

To fight gender-based stereotypes in the labour market and raise awareness about gender pay gap, the Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2021 – 2023 included various activities to raise awareness about these issues. For example, it contained educational activities for young people tackling the issue of gender segregation, reduction of gender pay gap and gender-based discrimination in the labour market by offering discussions on these topics, as well as ICT and leadership training for girls. Additionally, it contained activities aimed at employers to foster a more inclusive work environment, especially for persons who suffer from various forms of discrimination, as well as capacity building seminars for Roma women. To raise awareness of employees, employers and relevant state institutions about gender pay gap, MoW together with NGO "Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility Institute" also organised two rounds of seminars and discussions in 2021³⁰ and 2022³¹ about this issue by bringing together HR specialists, employees, relevant state institutions, employers, social partners and guests from other countries to talk about the issue of gender pay gap and search for possible solutions.

In 2020, an information campaign "Openness is a value" was launched addressing gender equality, particularly focusing on labour market issues. The campaign was tackling gender stereotypes and biases about professional choices, aiming to reduce gender segregation in the labour market. "He can=She can"³² was the slogan of the campaign, because a person's choices and interests (not gender) should be the only limits in choosing a career. There were several issues that the campaign was focusing on – stereotypes in education and career choice, gender pay gap, women's and men's roles in unpaid care work.

²⁹ <https://rigatechgirls.com>

³⁰ <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/diskusiju-cikls-par-vienlidziga-atalgojuma-veicinasanu>

³¹ <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/seminari-par-vienlidziga-atalgojuma-veicinasanu>

³² <https://atvertiba.lv/2020-dzimumu-lidztiesiba/>

In recent years, Latvia has also implemented various awareness raising activities for businesses about inclusive and diverse work environments, highlighting good practices. For example, with the aim of promoting a strategic approach to the development of an inclusive and diverse work environment, Society Integration Foundation of Latvia in 2023 launched an initiative to support Latvian employers – the Diversity Mentor Programme.³³ The Participants of the programme had the opportunity not only to expand their knowledge about diversity, but also to create a specific solution for their workplace, for example, to create and define their diversity and inclusion strategy or to develop an internal training programme. The participants were also able to cooperate with experienced experts, as well as representatives of other organisations and other participants of the programme. Additionally, Society Integration Foundation of Latvia is implementing an annual campaign “Diversity is Strength”, which brings together employers that want to promote diversity in their workplace. Since 2018, this movement has annually awarded five employers for promoting diversity management in their organisation and in the labour market of Latvia as a whole. Furthermore, since 2018, various organisations and employers can join Latvian Diversity Charter.

To promote work-life balance issues and involve more men in unpaid care work, Latvia has worked on strengthening its regulations in this area in recent years. On 1 August, 2022, amendments to the Labour Law³⁴ came into force, which foresee employer's obligation to grant carers' leave, if it is requested by an employee who needs to provide personal care or support to a spouse, parent, child, or other close family member who needs care or support for a serious medical reason.

To promote the father's involvement in child care, according to the previously mentioned amendments to the Labour Law, the father of a child is entitled to paternity leave of 10 working days (previously 10 calendar days). Paternity leave shall be granted immediately after the birth of the child, but not later than six months from the birth of the child.

Starting from January 1, 2023, amendments to the Law on Maternity and Sickness Insurance³⁵ foresee that the parent is entitled to choose the total period of the parental benefit, which consists of the period in which the parent receives parental benefit and the non-transferable part of the parental benefit period, which is two calendar months for each parent.

Investments have been made to foster availability of childcare and early childhood education services. For example, on May 9, 2023 the Cabinet of Ministers approved the draft regulation prepared by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MoEPRG) so that municipalities can continue to expand or create new preschool education buildings in their administrative territory, as well as to improve already existing infrastructure of kindergartens. Additionally, the Cabinet of Ministers have approved MoEPRG draft regulation, which foresees funding from the European Regional Development Fund for the development of the infrastructure of preschool educational institutions. Furthermore, there are also substantial investments planned to provide additional childcare services in Latvian municipalities.

³³ <https://www.dazadiba.lv/>

³⁴ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/26019-labour-law>

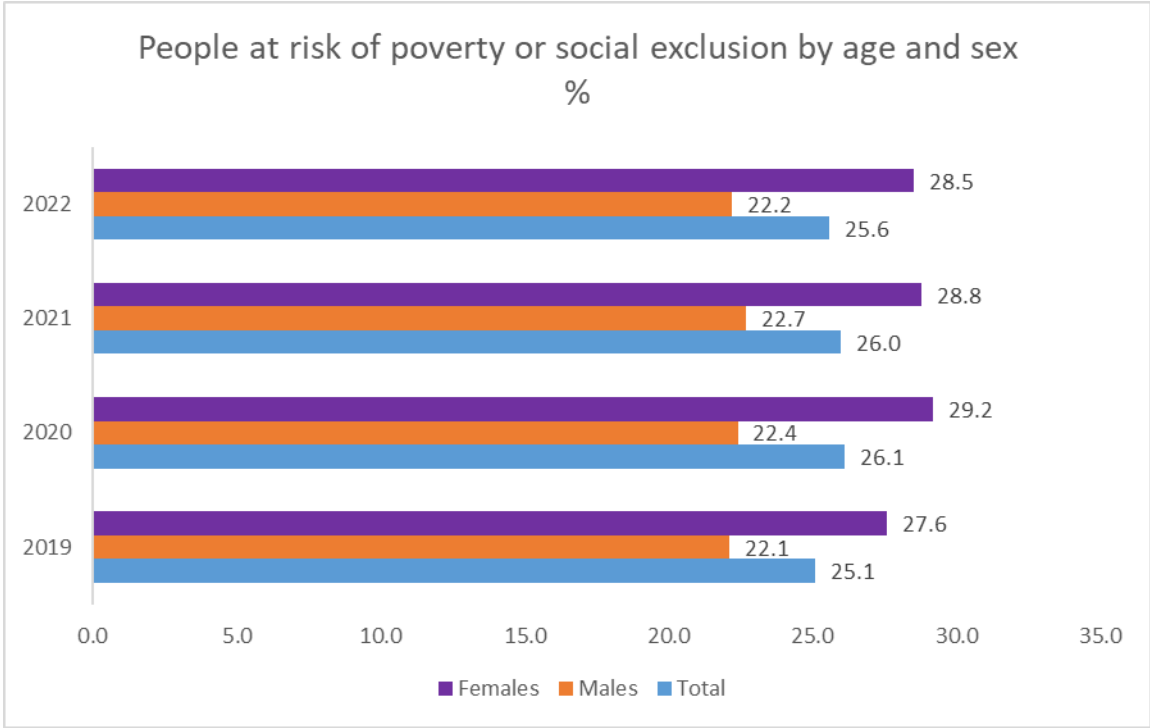
³⁵ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/38051-on-maternity-and-sickness-insurance>

In order to promote work life balance, as well as a more active men’s involvement in childcare and unpaid care work, MoW in cooperation with social partners (The Employers Confederation of Latvia (LDDK) and Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS)) implemented a project from March 1, 2020 to February 28, 2022 “Balance for All (B4A)”³⁶. The project was funded by the EU programme “Rights, Equality and Citizenship”. Within this project various informative and awareness raising measures were implemented for employers, employees and the general public in order to support the above-mentioned changes in Latvian legislation. Overall, 95 awareness raising measures were implemented and part of them focused on the promotion of father’s role in childcare and equal share of household responsibilities between men and women.

Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

Poverty eradication, especially women’s poverty eradication, has been one of Latvia's priorities over the last five years. According to the EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) women have been exposed to higher risks of poverty and social exclusion over the last five years (please, see Graph 1 below). In 2022, 28.5% of women and 22.2% of men were subjected to the risk of poverty and social exclusion. From 2020, there is a decreasing tendency of poverty risk for women, but the gap between men and women is still persistent.

Graph 1:



³⁶ <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/projekts/lidzsvars-visiem-b4a>

Source: National Statistical System of Latvia. Note: Eurostat publishes monetary indicators of poverty and social exclusion with reference to the year of the survey but the CSB of Latvia - with reference to the year of income. Thus, data published by Latvia for 2022 will be published on Eurostat website for 2023.

Additionally, women tend to be subjected to higher risks of poverty and social exclusion in all age groups. It has to be noted that the difference between the risk of poverty and social exclusion for women in the age group 65+ is considerably higher than for men in the same age group, i.e., in 2022 46,6% women over 65 were subjected to the risk of poverty and social exclusion (for men – 31.3%). The risk is even higher if a woman lives alone – 54%. Single person households in the age group of 65+ face very high risks of poverty and social exclusion – 67.8%, though there is a constant decreasing tendency from 2016.

Regarding households with children, single parent households face considerably higher risks of poverty. In Latvia single person households with children are headed mainly by women. In 2022, 29.6% single person households were subjected to the risk of poverty.

As for income inequality, women and men are in an almost equal situation – in 2022, the poorest women had less income by 6.1 times than the richest women, and for men – by 6.2 times.

Therefore, policies aimed to increase income of and provide services to elderly, vulnerable people and families with children can facilitate the reduction of the risk of poverty and social exclusion for women.

Between 2021 and 2023, a significant reform in the field of minimum income was introduced in Latvia – it is one of the most significant reforms in this field since Latvia joined the EU in 2004. The aim of the reform was setting a robust, sound and transparent method for making an adequate minimum income system and providing a regular and socio-economically justified revision of minimum income levels. Before the reform, all minimum income benefits and minimum pensions were set discretionary and their amount was not tied to any socio-economic indicator. This resulted in unchanged minimum income for many years and a very high at-risk-of poverty rate.

From 2021, the minimum income thresholds are based on the median income calculated from the EU statistics on income and living conditions and minimum benefits and minimum pensions have been set accordingly. The lowest minimum income threshold shall not be less than 20% of median income. The new minimum income calculation methodology applies to the social assistance provided to vulnerable households and persons, it also applies to the minimum levels of benefits and pensions defined by the state. In addition, from 2023, it was set in law that all the minimum income related benefits and pensions have to be revised annually. This will ensure that the average income growth in the country goes hand in hand with the income growth for the poorest and most vulnerable part of the population.

As a result of the reform, the minimum income benefits and minimum pension amounts changed substantially – over the five years the increase ranged from 50% to 168% (the amounts from 2020 to 2024 are seen in Table 1 in Annex I of this report).

In Latvia, low-income households and households in crisis situations have access to food support and basic material assistance, as well as the possibility to participate in accompanying measures. From

2015 to 2023, this support was available under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and starting from 2023 this support is available under the European Social Fund Plus Programme for Addressing Material Deprivation (ESF+ Programme). The aim is to reduce food deprivation and material deprivation as well as reduce social exclusion of low-income households.

Between 2019 and 2023, an average of 94.6 thousand individuals (unique persons) each year received support from the FEAD/ ESF+ Programme. On average, 39.8 thousand (42%) of these individuals were women. Starting from 2021, the number of recipients each year increased significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. A number of measures were taken to mitigate the negative impact of these events on low-income households, including:

During the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Remote processing of the necessary documents to receive aid, delivery of support packages to the person's home, if the person was unable to visit the distribution point;
- Extension of time period for the receipt of support packages;
- Addition of hand sanitizer and face masks to the contents of support packages;

The opportunity to receive one additional food package every three months as additional support in a situation with price inflation was also provided.

Ukrainian civilians - war refugees who arrived on the territory of Latvia starting from March 2022 have access to support under the same conditions as Latvian citizens - 31 473 Ukrainian civilians (46% women) received support in 2022, 16 081 Ukrainian civilians (42% women) received support in 2023.

When it comes to Latvian social protection system, the gender equality aspect has been taken into account when the social protection system of Latvia was designed. The right to work and consequently the right to social insurance (protection), and its benefits are ensured for men and women as an individual right. All the employees and self-employed persons are subject to compulsory social insurance. In addition, to improve access to social security, social insurance contributions are made from the state special social insurance budget for the parent during the receipt of child-care allowance.

Latvia guarantees access to maternity protection, paid maternity, paternity and parental leave and adequate social security benefits for both women and men. Concerning access to maternity protection, Section 154 of the Labour Law prescribes provisions for prenatal leave, Section 155 – provisions for leave to the father of a child or to another person who is not the mother of the child in order to be involved in the care for the child upon request of the mother of the child. Section 156 determines the provisions for parental leave.

According to Paragraph six, Section 149 of the Labour Law, after the above-mentioned leaves, an employee has the right to such improvements to working conditions and employment provisions to which he or she would have been entitled if he or she had not been on leave. Also, Labour Law prescribes the prohibition to cause adverse consequences and prohibition of differential treatment during the period of existence of employment relationship.

At the same time, provisions of the Labour Law also provide other opportunities for employee for reconciliation of work and family life, for example, to work part-time or remotely, if such possibility exists in the undertaking; to use breaks for feeding a child; to leave the workplace in order to undergo health examination in the prenatal period if it is not possible to undergo such examination outside of working time; to use temporary absence in the case of the child's illness or accident, as well as for the purpose of participating in the child's health examination when it is not possible to undergo this examination outside working time; to request leave without retention of remuneration in other cases; to use prenatal leave and maternity leave and also parental leave.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to provide support to families, especially for women with small children (82% of all parental benefit recipients in Latvia in March 2020 were women), from April 4, 2020 to November 15, 2021, the continuation of the payment of parental allowance after the child has reached the age of one or one and a half years was introduced. This continuation of the parental benefits could be paid for the period from March 12, 2020 until the day when the person starts to earn income as an employee or self-employed, but no longer than the end of the state of emergency declared due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 mitigation measures were targeted at different groups of people who experienced income cuts and changes in their employment situation, for people at higher risk of poverty and/or social exclusion, for people during the period of incapacity for work, for people whose reception of social services was affected by the restrictions imposed during the emergency situation. For example, an employed or self-employed person who had a child under 24 years of age could receive an extra 50 EUR benefit when receiving downtime benefits due to Covid-19 pandemic. In spring of 2020, a one-off supplement of 150 EUR was paid additionally to the state family allowance for a parent of a disabled child. There was also a one-off allowance of 500 EUR for parents per child.

To support elderly persons and persons with disabilities during Covid-19 pandemic, a one-off allowance of 200 EUR was granted to a person living in Latvia who, during the Covid-19 period from 1 March, 2021 till the end of the state of the emergency was the recipient of the Latvian old age, disability or survivor's pension, the beneficiary of a special state pension or service pension.

To support employees in the field of social services, who are usually women, during Covid-19 pandemic a fixed bonus of 50% to the monthly wage was added for the care of an infected client and being a contact person, if the service was provided in the institution in which social services with accommodation, as well as in the day care centre or nursing home is provided by a state, local government institution or a contract organisation.

High energy prices in 2022 and 2023 additionally impacted already vulnerable groups of Latvian society, especially elderly women and single parent households. To mitigate this impact during the heating season, two approaches were applied.

Energy-specific measures that were aimed mainly to compensate for rising energy prices during the heating period, i.e. price thresholds for electricity, natural gas, centralised and decentralised heating, were set based on average consumption and historical data on prices in previous years. Compensation to households/ consumers was provided if the factual prices exceeded before mentioned price thresholds. Households received support for energy and heating (very broad scope of heating types –

pellets, briquettes, firewood, propane-butane gas, fuel diesel, natural gas and electricity). Alongside a fixed part of the electricity bill - mandatory procurement component (a state-mandated support mechanism for electricity producers that co-generate electricity or use renewable energy resources) for a certain period was financed by the state. There was also an increase of adequacy and/ or coverage of existing social assistance benefits, support for protected consumers and introduction of temporary differentiated state benefit to pensions and certain state benefit recipients.

As for energy-specific measures no targeting was applied – all households were eligible to receive this support. However, benefits or additional payments to pensions/ state benefits were targeted – the amount of the benefit was differentiated according to the pension amount of the person and paid to those whose pension amount did not exceed the fixed threshold. Support provided to vulnerable groups was additional to existing support, i.e., no replacement was made. For example, pensioners, families with children with disabilities, refugees and people with alternative status received monthly support from November 2022 till May 2023 in addition to their pension or benefit. As for targeting, recipients of pensions received support according to their pension amount – the smaller the pension, the higher the support:

- if the pension was lower than €300 then the allowance was €30 per month,
- for those with monthly pensions from €301 to €509 – the allowance was €20 per month,
- with pensions from €510 to €603 – the allowance was €10 per month.
- Those with pensions above €604 were not eligible for the allowance.

Existing support for protected consumers (monthly compensation for electricity bill, fixed amount for each group of protected consumers) are targeted to those under higher risk of poverty and/ or social exclusion – low-income households, needy households, families with 3 and more children, families raising child with a disability, persons with very severe functional impairments (I group of disability).

Furthermore, coverage of housing benefit which is permanently provided by municipalities to low-income households was broadened by increasing coefficients that are applied during the heating season in calculation of the amount of the housing benefit, thus giving the possibility for more people/ households with relatively low income (but exceeding the low-income household threshold) to apply for the housing benefit. In addition to the general support measures, the conditions for the granting of housing assistance were revised during the heating seasons 2022 and 2023 so that a wider range of households could benefit from it and to give more support to households at higher risk of poverty and/or social exclusion (single pensioner or person with disability, or household composed exclusively of persons of retirement age or persons with disabilities).

When it comes to health issues in Latvia, women have a higher life expectancy than men – the life expectancy of new born boys is less than girls by almost 10 years. In 2021, healthy life years in Latvia accounted for 52.2 years among men and 55.4 years among women. The EU average indicator was higher among both men and women – 63.1 and 64.2 years, respectively. ³⁷

³⁷ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6296-gender-equality-health>

As national data shows, in 2023, 52.4 % of men and 43.9 % of women in Latvia assessed their health as good or very good.³⁸ Low self-perceived general health status of women may be related to the large share of elderly female population. In the age group of 65+, women assess their health as good or very good by 2.2 percentage points less than men. Younger women (aged 25-34 years) assess their health as good or very good by 4.9 percentage points more than men of the same age.

Regular visits to medical practitioners and medical examinations allow to find and treat health problems timely. In 2022, 70.3 % of men and 83.0 % of women had visited a family doctor at least once, while 36.9 % of men and 48.8 % of women had consulted a specialist at least once a year.³⁹

In 2023, 10.1 % of men and 12.4 % of women admitted that they did not undergo the necessary medical examination or treatment, although there was such a need. The most pronounced gender differences among the stated reasons for not visiting doctors are: men more often than women wanted to wait and see if it would get better with time (men - 26.1 %, women - 7.9 %), and also indicate that they were afraid of doctors, hospitals and examinations (men 2.4 %, women – 1.2 %). On the other hand, women much more often than men did not visit doctors due to excessively long queues for an appointment (women - 48.1 %, men - 29.9 %), as well as they indicated financial inability to visit a doctor (women - 24.4 %, men - 20.7 %)⁴⁰.

Regarding the situation of sexual and reproductive health in Latvia, MoH, together with Riga Stradins University and “TNS Latvia”, conducted a study on factors affecting sexual and reproductive health of Latvian residents in order to obtain data that reveal trends among Latvian residents in this area in the age group of 15-64.⁴¹ The data showed a worrying trend of insufficient knowledge, unsafe contraception use and unplanned pregnancies among young people. Furthermore, the data shows that there is a high proportion of the population that does not use the opportunity to participate in oncological disease screening, only a third of population has sufficient knowledge about HIV, more than one third of the population has had at least one unplanned pregnancy, only half of the population has discussed sexual and reproductive health issues with their children and only a third of the population believes that they have received sufficient information on sexual and reproductive health topics at school.

In the context of health and health care services, since 2019, various initiatives have been implemented to ensure accessible healthcare for women and girls. For example, from 2022, state funded breast reconstruction is available for women after malignant tumour surgery. This service is available both to those women who have been diagnosed with a malignant tumour, and to patients for whom treatment has already been completed and implant placement is to be performed.

³⁸ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6296-gender-equality-health>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6296-gender-equality-health>

⁴¹ <https://www.esparveselibu.lv/petijums/petijums-par-latvijas-iedzivotaju-seksualas-un-reproduktivas-veselibas-ietekmejosiem>

A pilot project was launched in January 2023 to ensure state paid contraception for women in social risk groups⁴². Since January 1, 2024 this service is fully available and funded by the state.

When it comes to maternity care, from 2022, the age limit has been increased from 37 to 40 years for participants in the state compensated medical fertilisation programme. A donor milk bank was established in 2022 to provide breast milk to children who cannot receive it from their mothers. From August 1, 2022, epidural analgesia is also paid from state budget funds, if a woman has expressed a wish to receive it at childbirth. Additionally, to enhance the accessibility of healthcare services for pregnant women, amendments were made to the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on January 1, 2024. These amendments, outlined in Regulation No. 555 of August 28, 2018, "Procedure for organisation and payment of health care"⁴³ state that if a pregnant woman or a woman within 70 days of postpartum experiences a sudden illness or worsening of a chronic condition that poses a risk to her health or the progress of the pregnancy, and requires specialist consultation or examination, the medical institution must provide the necessary secondary outpatient healthcare service within 10 working days from the day the individual seeks care at the medical institution.

Furthermore, to ensure higher-quality ultrasound examinations during pregnancy, stricter recertification requirements have been introduced for gynaecologists and obstetric specialists since 2021. From 2022, state-paid pertussis vaccination is also provided for pregnant women.

The MoH is presently developing the national program – “The Maternal and Child Health Improvement Plan 2025 – 2027” with the aim of enhancing maternal and child health while reducing maternal and infant mortality rates. As part of this initiative, access to contraceptives funded by the state budget will be ensured for women belonging to the most disadvantaged groups and young individuals. Additionally, there are plans to amend Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 611 of July 25, 2006, titled "Procedures for Assistance with Deliveries"⁴⁴ to broaden the scope of healthcare services provided during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period.

To promote girls' health, public awareness campaigns to promote vaccination among 12–18-year-old girls against HPV (Human Papillomavirus) were launched.⁴⁵ Since 2022, state funded vaccination against HPV is also available to 12–14-year-old boys.

In order to improve the sexual and reproductive health of Latvian society, to implement a unified policy for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health in society, the MoH has implemented various measures, including:

- In order to have the opportunity to implement educational activities on sexual and reproductive health in each local government of Latvia according to a common methodology and of equivalent quality, and to provide in each local government a specialist who is familiar with this subject and its importance to young people, the MoH in cooperation with specialists within the framework of the

⁴² The service is available to women who have been diagnosed with psychiatric developmental disorders (diagnoses F70-F79), struggle with alcohol or drug addiction, have given birth before the age of 19 or women who are incarcerated or recently released from prison.

⁴³ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/301399-procedures-for-the-organisation-of-and-payment-for-health-care-services>

⁴⁴ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/140695-dzemdibu-palidzibas-nodrosinasanas-kartiba>

⁴⁵ <https://www.spkc.gov.lv/lv/uzvari-cina-ar-vezi-pirms-ta-sakas>

ESF project, has developed a unified educational programme for two age groups (pupils of grades 5-7 and 8-12) regarding sexual and reproductive health issues, including reducing the risks of sexual violence, as well as building safe and respectful relationships. For the successful implementation of the program in 2021 and 2022, two days of free training for delegated representatives of local governments were provided. The training was organised in an informal atmosphere, promoting the ability to discuss real situations in an interesting and simple way and to include young people's knowledge, ideas, and experiences.

- To raise public awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues and to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections, the number of pregnancies of minors and abortions performed, as well as to disprove most popular myths prevailing in society about sexual and reproductive health, and also to promote the establishment of safe and respectful relationships and mutual dialogue on these topics, in 2023, the MoH implemented a public awareness campaign "How fluently do you speak the language of sex?"⁴⁶. As part of the campaign, an educational film was developed for children and young people on how to build respectful, healthy relationships, how to talk about sexual and reproductive health issues, and how to refute the most common myths among young people. Information and educational classes were conducted for young people in grades 8-12 in schools on sexual and reproductive health and safe relationship building, covering an audience of more than 20,000 individuals.

- In order to improve and promote young people's understanding of sexual and reproductive health, including both physiological and psycho-emotional aspects, as well as to provide encouragement to adolescents during the changes caused by puberty, in 2023, the MoH developed "Educational films for pupils in grades 5-12 on sexual and reproductive health"⁴⁷ within the framework of the ESF project. The three episodes of the training film include the most important issues about puberty stage for girls and boys, including questions about physiological changes in the body and first sexual experiences.

Additionally, to improve and strengthen the understanding of young people with intellectual disabilities of sexual and reproductive health issues, as well as to reduce the risk of becoming victims of sexual violence, in 2022, the MoH, in cooperation with the NGO "Papardes Zieds", implemented state-funded educational classes for young people with intellectual disabilities on the changes caused by puberty, hygiene, mutual safe and respectful relationships, violation of private boundaries and the ability to tell "No!", as well as STIs and various types of contraception.

To promote girls' reproductive health, inclusive environments in educational institutions and fight period poverty, MoW, MoH and MoES are working on the possible solutions to provide menstrual hygiene products such as pads and tampons to girls aged 11-19 and the inclusion of these products in aid packages for low-income households. The initiative was started by Latvian Women's NGO Network which also provides free menstrual hygiene products in some Latvian schools as a part of a pilot project.

⁴⁶ <https://esparveselibu.lv/kampana/cik-brivi-tu-runa-seksa-valoda-par-veiklu-valodu>

⁴⁷ <https://esparveselibu.lv/veselibas-ministrija-piedava-macibu-filmu-skoleniem-par-seksualo-un-reproduktivo-veselibu>

Since August 1, 2019, support personnel has been provided at HIV prevention points for individuals who have received a positive express test result for HIV/Hepatitis B/Hepatitis C. The purpose of such a service is to provide support to the infected person so that he or she starts the treatment of the infectious disease in a timely manner, continuing to be involved in the treatment process. There are also mobile harm reduction services that provide rapid checks, syringe distribution, condom distribution, as well as advice. Mobile harm reduction services are organised by NGOs.

Upon entering into pregnancy records, all women undergo examinations for the detection of HIV infection. This service is paid for by the state. HIV-positive pregnant women are provided with the information about therapy options, as well as information about the necessary actions to prevent the transmission of the infection to the child. In Latvia children born to HIV-infected mothers are provided with state-funded formula milk up to one year old.

Recommendations have been developed to ensure the awareness of healthcare personnel and mutual collaboration in working with women at risk of HIV infection. In 2023, Cabinet regulations "Regulations for limiting the spread of human immunodeficiency virus infection (HIV) and AIDS"⁴⁸ were approved, which determine specific epidemiological safety measures to limit the spread of HIV and AIDS, including determination of HIV infection, investigation of conditions of HIV infection, procedures for the determination, informing and investigation of exposed persons, organisation of prevention of HIV infection after exposure, organisation of treatment of HIV and AIDS patients arrangements in accordance with best scientific evidence-based practice. The Regulation provides for procedures that determine the obligation for a doctor who has first diagnosed HIV infection to ensure informing of an HIV-infected person regarding the ways of spreading HIV infection, individual preventive measures and the responsibility of the person towards his or her own health and that of other people, as well as the obligation to inform the person (contact person) who has had the risk of contracting HIV through contact (through sexual contact or using intravenous drugs) together with the particular HIV-infected patient, to also recommend that the contact person go to the doctor and carry out preventive examination of HIV infection.

When it comes to gender equality in education in Latvia - in 2023, 39.7 % of women and 25.7 % of men in Latvia had higher education. The number of vocational and professional school graduates, in turn, is dominated by men – 31.7 % and 26.8 %, respectively. Men are more likely than women not to continue their education after primary education. Compared to the EU average, the proportion of men with higher education in Latvia is 1.7 percentage points lower, while that of women is 8.4 percentage points higher than in the EU.⁴⁹

Gender segregation in Latvia in education is especially pronounced - regardless of the fact that women constitute the largest share of higher education students, science and technical fields are more often

⁴⁸ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/340156-regulations-regarding-the-restriction-of-the-spread-of-human-immunodeficiency-virus-hiv-infection-and-aids>

⁴⁹ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6301-gender-equality-education>

chosen by men. Women constitute only 36.1 % of the science and technical field (life science, mathematics, IT, engineering, manufacturing and construction) graduates.⁵⁰

In 2020, NGO Providus conducted a study⁵¹ on the representation of women in the ICT sector. It came to the conclusion that women who would like to specialise in ICT faced a relatively high level of social counter-pressure. 57% of respondents would fully support boys specialising in ICT, while the number of respondents strongly supporting girls would be nearly two times smaller (26%). Furthermore, 6% of respondents would definitely not recommend it for girls, while 22% would probably not recommend it for girls, compared to 2.1% and 4.7% for boys, respectively. In contrast, boys who want to work in the education sector, where society would benefit from greater gender equality among teachers, are the ones who face counter-pressure.

The share of early school leavers (aged 18–24) in 2023 increased by 1.0 percentage points reaching 7.7 %. However, there are some gender differences regarding early school leavers, as men leave studies after basic education more often than women – 10.0 % of men and 5.5 % of women aged 18–24 have basic education or lower and are not participating in education anymore.⁵²

When it comes to adult participation in learning - in 2023, 10.7 % of the population of Latvia aged 25–64 had participated in education or training during the past four weeks. The share of such persons among women was 5.7 percentage points higher – 13.5 % of women and 7.8 % of men participated in education or training.⁵³

If we look at general education, PISA 2022 report shows that there are some gender differences in performance between girls and boys. Boys outperformed girls in mathematics by 10 score points and girls outperformed boys in reading by 28 score points. The share of low performers in general education is similar among boys (22%) and girls (22%) in mathematics. In reading, however, the share is larger among boys (18% of girls and 28% of boys scored below Level 2 in reading). When it comes to top performers, the share is larger among boys (8%) than among girls (5%) in mathematics; in reading, however, the share is larger among girls (5% of girls and 3% of boys scored at Level 5 or 6 in reading).⁵⁴

Regarding actions taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, Strategy on Education Development 2021-2027⁵⁵ (adopted on 22 June 2021) emphasises inclusive education at all levels. The aim of the Strategy is to provide quality education opportunities for all Latvian residents in order to promote the development and realisation of their potential throughout life and to build their ability to change and responsibly manage the constant changes in society. Latvia has also introduced the new competence-based approach in general education curricula, providing quality

⁵⁰ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6301-gender-equality-education>

⁵¹ https://providus.lv/article_files/3668/original/Providus-women-representation-ikt-1.0.pdf?1594635227

⁵² <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6301-gender-equality-education>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/latvia-f58bca29/>

⁵⁵ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324332-par-izglitiba-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam>

education for all students. According to the new approach, the curriculum includes issues on respecting gender equality and human rights.

In Latvia, improvement of education outcomes and skills is aimed at both genders, considering the inclusiveness of the education system. Therefore, all activities included in the Strategy on Education Development 2021-2027 – including availability of quality education for all, strengthening education curriculum, professional development of teachers to support implementation of the new curriculum, digital literacy – are aimed at all pupils.

The National Centre for Education implemented two projects aimed at supporting development of pupils' talents and individual competencies, which included the following activities:

- Fostering student research activity, providing support for the development of research competences, participation in regional, national and international level scientific research competitions, as well as practical orientation measures for deepening knowledge and developing talents;
- Support for teachers in implementing individual approach;
- Creation of a sustainable support system of municipal general education institutions for the development of individual competencies of pupils (development of methodological recommendations and application training, ICT resources, improvement of the professional competence of teachers);
- Providing sustainable individual approach development measures for learning the curriculum and in the form of extracurricular activities (including STEM).

There is an unequal representation of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) areas in higher education institutions. Being aware of the disproportion, the government has been promoting STEM subjects by gradually increasing the proportion of publicly financed study places in STEM fields. The policy does not involve any gender related aspects but rather promotes the general demand towards study fields linked to high added-value economic sectors.

Regarding additional activities geared towards fighting gender-based stereotypes in education and career choices and women's and girls' participation in STEM, please see section "Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work".

The new Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-2027 will also include activities to foster gender equality issue streamlining in education, for example, extra-curricular activities for girls' involvement in STEM, a leadership programme for girls, as well as activities to improve professional competence of social studies teachers for the 7th-9th grade level regarding gender equality issues.

Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

In recent years, fighting against gender-based violence and domestic violence has been one of Latvia's priorities when it comes to gender equality policy. There have been improvements in laws and

policies, services provided for victims of gender-based and domestic violence, as well as different awareness raising activities.

As a 2021 survey from CSB shows⁵⁶ – every fourth woman (25.1%) in Latvia aged 18-74 has experienced physical or sexual violence. The survey data also showed that every third (30.1%) woman in Latvia has experienced psychological, physical or sexual violence or a combination of several forms of violence while being in a relationship. This data shows that the prevalence of gender-based and domestic violence in Latvia is still high and that the overall tolerance towards violence in society is quite high.

When it comes to intimate partner violence in Latvia the most common form of violence among intimate partners in Latvia is psychological violence – 28.8% of women have experienced it. 15.4% of women have experienced physical violence (including threats) and 4.4% of women have experienced sexual violence from their partners. Intimate partner violence is even more prevalent if a woman has long-standing health problems limiting daily activities – almost half (48.3%) of women with such health problems have experienced some form of violence from their intimate partner.⁵⁷

According to the information prepared by the State Police on the "Competence of the State Police in the field of violence prevention", in domestic violence cases in 2022, out of a total of 647 calls, in 616 cases the victim was a woman, and the perpetrator was a man. Out of 616 cases, in 438 cases the violence occurred between married partners and spouses, which shows that mostly domestic violence occurs between intimate partners.

Regarding changes in laws and policies, the main achievement to strengthen women's protection from all forms of violence and to promote effective equality between women and men was the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention and Suppression of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which entered into force in Latvia on May 1 of 2024.

Additionally, Latvia is currently working on the development of its first National Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029. The Plan will have 4 directions of action: (1) prevention of violence against women and domestic violence; (2) provision and improvement of support measures for victims of violence; (3) strengthening the responsibility of perpetrators and provision of rehabilitation services to reduce violent behaviour; (4) establishment of a unified and coordinated policy to combat and prevent violence against women and domestic violence. It is planned that it will be completed and come into force by autumn of 2024. The issue of domestic violence and violence against women is reflected in several other policy planning documents: Social Protection and Labour Market Policy Strategy 2021-2027, Strategy on Children, Youth and Family Development 2022-2027⁵⁸, Plan for Promoting Equal Rights and Opportunities for

⁵⁶ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/population/crimes/publications-and-infographics/10940-prevalence-violence-2021>

⁵⁷ https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2022-08/Nr_08_Vardarbibas_izplatiba_Latvija_2021_%2822_00%29_LV_EN.pdf

⁵⁸ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/338304-par-bernu-jaunatnes-un-gimenes-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20222027gadam>

Women and Men 2021-2023, Strategy on Public Health 2021-2027⁵⁹, Strategy on Education Development 2021-2027⁶⁰, Strategy on Resocialization Policy 2022-2027.⁶¹

In both 2023 and 2024, prevention of domestic violence was high on the political agenda. Separate sessions were held in the Crime Prevention Council, which consists of the prime minister, ministers, as well as the heads of law enforcement agencies, to discuss the issue of preventing domestic violence. The Council supported several initiatives, such as to make appropriate amendments to the laws, as well as to develop an action plan for the prevention of domestic violence.

In the summer of 2023, amendments to the Criminal Law⁶² and the Criminal Procedure Law⁶³ entered into force, which supplemented the norms with the feature of additional compositions of crimes in close relationships, strengthened the punishments for relevant crimes and also determined that domestic violence shall be considered as a priority criminal case in the courts.

Article 132 of the Criminal Code (Threatening to Commit Murder and to Inflict Serious Bodily Injury) and Article 132.1 (Stalking) were supplemented with a new second part, which provides criminal liability for threatening to commit murder or to inflict serious bodily injury, if there have been reasonable grounds to fear that these threats may be carried out, as well as for stalking, if they have been committed against a person to whom the perpetrator of a criminal offence is related in the first or second degree of kinship, or against the spouse or former spouse, or against a person with whom the perpetrator of a criminal offence is or has been in continuous intimate relationships, or against a person with whom the perpetrator of a criminal offence has a joint (single) household, the applicable punishment is the deprivation of liberty for a period of up to three years or temporary deprivation of liberty, or probationary supervision, or community service, or fine.

Also, the transitional provisions of the Criminal Code were supplemented with point 25.1, which stipulates that the penalty - probation supervision - shall also be applied to adults who have committed the criminal offence provided for in Articles 132, 132.1 and 168.1 of the Criminal law. In connection with stalking and domestic violence related crimes, it is necessary to work on changing the behaviour and thinking of the stalkers and abusers.

Articles 132 of the Criminal Code (Threatening to Commit Murder and to Inflict Serious Bodily Injury) and Article 132.1 (Stalking) and 168.1 (Failure to Comply with a Ruling on the Protection against Violence) of the Criminal Code have been supplemented with a prison sentence of up to one year, thus increasing the criminal liability for these crimes. With the amendments in Articles 132, 132.1 and 168.1 of the Criminal Code, the criminal offences in accordance with the third part of Article 7 of the Criminal Code became less serious crimes, thus applying to them a wider legal framework strengthened by the Criminal Code related to special investigative activities, procedural terms, security measures and international criminal justice cooperation. In addition, in accordance with the fifth part of Article 277 of the Criminal Procedure Law, a person who is suspected or accused

⁵⁹ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/332751-sabiedribas-veselibas-pamatnostadnes-2021-2027-gadam>

⁶⁰ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324332-par-izglitibas-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam>

⁶¹ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/333223-par-resocializacijas-politikas-pamatnostadnem-20222027-gadam>

⁶² <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/88966-criminal-law>

⁶³ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/107820-criminal-procedure-law>

of committing a less serious crime may be detained for up to nine months, of which the person is allowed to be detained for no longer than four months in the pre-trial process.

In addition, the MoJ has submitted amendments to the Parliament to exclude community service and fines as punishments from these criminal offenses - Article 126 (Intentional Moderate Bodily Injury), the third part of Article 130 (Intentional Slight Bodily Injury), Article 130.1 "Torture", Article 132, Article 132.1 "Stalking", Article 153 (Kidnapping of a person), the first and second parts of Article 174 (Cruelty and violence against minors) exclude punishment - community service and a fine.

Also, a proposal has been submitted to supplement the Criminal law with a new article, which would provide for criminal liability for cruel or violent treatment of a person with whom the perpetrator of the criminal offence is related in the first or second degree of kinship, or against the spouse or former spouse, or against a person with whom the perpetrator of a criminal offence is or has been in continuous intimate relationships, or against a person with whom the perpetrator of a criminal offence has a joint (single) household, if physical or mental suffering has been caused to said person and if these actions did not have the consequences provided for in Articles 125, 126 or 130 of this Law. Such a proposal has been submitted to ensure zero tolerance for domestic violence. Therefore, it is desirable to establish a separate article in the Criminal Code that provides for criminal liability for violence committed against a loved one (in the family/partnership). Intimate partner violence is a specific type of violence with its own internal psychological dynamics and is mostly systematic and long-lasting, and it includes many different forms of violent behaviour.

In addition, a proposal has also been submitted to Criminal Procedure Law to envisage electronic surveillance as a procedural security measure to a suspect or an accused if there are grounds to believe that the relevant person will continue criminal activities or hinder pre-trial criminal proceedings or court or avoid such proceedings and court

By strengthening the civil procedural regulation for temporary protection against violence, amendments were made to the Civil Procedure Law⁶⁴ in 2021. The means of protection against violence have been supplemented with a new remedy - the obligation for the violent person to take a social rehabilitation course to reduce violent behaviour. The purpose of this measure is to prevent and eliminate further risks of violence in the long term. The discretion of the court in determining this remedy is also provided for, since the court, when considering the claim, can apply it on its own initiative. It is the first remedy that has a preventive effect on the behaviour of the violent person. The law provides that it cannot be replaced by other remedies. Thus, women are protected from violence in the long term by having a preventive effect on the behaviour of the abuser.

To facilitate the work of police officers when responding to gender-based and domestic violence cases, on February 17, 2022, amendments to the law "On Police"⁶⁵ came into force, which allows police officers to take a decision to separate a person who poses a threat from a victim without a written application of the victim. Additionally, the police officer needs to inform the municipal social service institution in all cases where the risk of violence or threats has been identified, whether or not

⁶⁴ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/50500-civil-procedure-law>

⁶⁵ <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/67957-on-police>

a police decision on the separation was taken. Until these amendments were made, a police officer could take a decision on separation only on the basis of a written application of the victim of domestic violence.

To strengthen the capacity and awareness of judges, police officers, social workers and other specialists when working with cases of gender-based and domestic violence there also have been several capacity building and training activities. In October 2023, the e-course "Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence" for judges and prosecutors, developed by the European Council of the Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) program, was launched. The course took place both online and remotely. This online course covered, in an interactive way, the main concepts, international and European legal frameworks, and European case law governing the prevention and protection of violence against women and girls, focusing in particular on the aspects of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Starting from 2024, a training titled "An Approach Focused on the Needs of the Victim of Violence in the Judicial System" is being provided for judges and prosecutors, with the possibility of including investigators in the training. The training is conducted by the NGO "Centre MARTA" and will continue until May 2026. Approximately 160 academic hours of training are included as part of the program.

Additionally, since 2024, the training plan for judges includes the provision of such training as follows:

- 1) "Qualification questions regarding criminal offences related to violence and incitement to hatred. Current issues and judicial practices regarding non-compliance with decisions on protection against violence."
- 2) "Communication and interpersonal skills training for judicial system personnel", where judges are scheduled to receive training on communication aspects when working with the victims of violence.

On November 8, 2023, Latvian police officers and staff of the State Police College, took part in the launching of a new Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) online course on "Violence against women and domestic violence for law enforcement". This tutored online course spanning three months, aims to provide police officers with both theoretical and practical materials related to violence against women. The course raised awareness amongst participants about the many forms of violence and its impact on victims and society as a whole. Participants also discussed how to respond quickly and effectively to cases of violence against women and domestic violence. The course covered techniques for interviewing victims and perpetrators, as well as practical steps for first responders and investigators.

MoW together with NGO "Centre MARTA" also organised seminars for specialists who work with different aspects of domestic violence and gender-based violence about emotional and psychological violence in order to strengthen the skills of professionals in recognizing such violence and providing support to victims of such violence.

In 2020, a methodological material⁶⁶ for social work on victims of violence and perpetrators was also developed. The purpose of the methodological material is to provide methodological support to social workers practising in local government social services who work daily with victims of violence and perpetrators. The material includes a broad range of theories, methods and approaches recommended for social work with victims of violence and/or perpetrators. Within the framework of this methodology, in-depth training was also developed, which were available to social workers of municipalities free of charge. A six-week, total 12-hour online module has also been developed, which is available on the learning platform of the School of State Administration.

When it comes to services for the victims of gender-based and domestic violence, there have been some improvements, for example, since July 1, 2023, there is a new state service available for victims of gender based and domestic violence – crisis apartments. The crisis apartment service is provided for up to 30 days. If it is necessary, the stay in the apartment can be extended up to 180 days. The crisis apartment service will be provided in cases where there is a high risk of violence, when a person’s life and health are in danger and this is confirmed by an assessment made by social services or social rehabilitation service provider. If necessary, during the stay in the crisis apartment, individual special consultations or support services will also be provided to the victim of violence.

To broaden the target group of vulnerable persons who can receive state rehabilitation service for victims of violence, in 2021, amendments to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance were made to provide the possibility of granting social services to a person who, due to objective circumstances, does not have a declared place of residence. The amendments also provide that the persons who are staying in the Republic of Latvia with a temporary residence permit, as well as third-country nationals or stateless persons who do not have a legal basis for staying in the Republic of Latvia and who have been detained can also receive rehabilitation service for adult victims of violence.

Substantial attention has also been paid to prevention work and awareness raising about various forms of gender-based and domestic violence. Every year, the MoW implements public awareness campaigns on gender-based violence and domestic violence, especially evaluating the current events of the current year and directing the message of the campaigns to relevant issues. The aim of the campaigns is to provide information on how to recognize forms of violence, the rights of victims and information on where to turn for help, and what to do bystanders if violence is observed. For example, in 2022, MoW launched awareness raising campaign on psychological violence called “Psychological Violence – Invisible but Real”⁶⁷. The aim of the campaign was to draw public attention to the devastating impact of psychological violence. It is essential to promote a common understanding of the phenomenon of psychological violence and to encourage victims to seek help. The campaign consisted of various media activities - posters, video advertisements on social media and on state TV and radio, as well as informative opinion pieces on psychological violence – how to recognize it and where to seek help.

⁶⁶ <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/media/8377/download>

⁶⁷ <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/emocionala-vardarbiba-neredzama-bet-ista>

Regional seminars and an international conference are also organised annually on different aspects of domestic and gender-based violence, in which representatives from law enforcement authorities, social services and support providers participate. For example, on November 16, 2023, MoW together with NGO “Skalbes” and MoI organised an annual conference on violence against women and domestic violence, which focused on inter-institutional cooperation to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.

When it comes to prevention, it is also very important to work with girls and young people in general about respectful relationship building and harmful gender-based stereotypes. For example, to promote positive gender equality attitudes, beliefs, values and norms, especially among men and boys, MoW, in 2022 and 2023, together with an NGO, organised workshops and discussions for young people on how to build non-violent and respectful relationships based on the principle of gender equality. Workshops were organised in different Latvian towns and cities for young people aged 15 to 19. With the help of informal education methods, youth mentors from NGO “Centre MARTA” talked about healthy relationship building, harmful gender stereotypes and how to recognize discrimination and violent behaviour in a relationship.

To strengthen children’s, especially girls’, abilities to recognize violence and build healthy personal boundaries, NGO “Dardedze” organises Jimba’s Safety School (Džimbas drošības skola).⁶⁸ It is a programme designed for children in the age group of 5 to 11 years old. The purpose of this programme is to educate children about safety in relationships, thus reducing the risks of violence. As part of the programme, with the help of music, toys, films and role-playing games, complex topics become easy to understand for children. With the financial support of the MoW, in the period from March to the end of November 2022, 160 classes of "Visiting Jimba" in person and online, three "Jimba Summer Schools" and 30 "Jimba Guest School" lessons have been implemented.

There have also been various activities to reduce bullying in schools. As PISA 2022 data shows, some 29% of girls and 29% of boys reported being the victim of bullying acts at least a few times a month (OECD average: 20% of girls and 21% of boys).⁶⁹

In 2022, in order to reduce the prevalence of mockery and bullying in the educational environment, the MoH, in cooperation with specialists in the fields, developed guidelines for two age groups: (1) pre-school and primary school age group and (2) primary and secondary schools, including vocational education institutions. The guidelines include theoretical information on the most common types of emotional abuse in educational institutions, including mockery and cyber bullying, including information and methodological guidance on the prevention of mockery and bullying in the educational institution and its prevention at three levels. The guidelines are based on the experience of other countries, available research and anti-mockery programmes. Their content is suitable for the Latvian educational environment and is adapted to educational institutions where special education programs are acquired.

⁶⁸ <https://www.dzimba.lv/lv/atbalsts-dzimbasm-drosibas-programmai/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/latvia-f58bca29/>

In recent years, the rapid development of information and communication technologies has changed the emphasis on the way and environment of committing criminal offences and they are increasingly being committed in the digital environment. Consequently, policy makers must also ensure that the legal regulatory framework is relevant to reality and, where necessary, is improved to cover technological developments. The Criminal Law of Latvia does not distinguish between the environments in which a criminal offence is committed. Consequently, if any actions that correspond to the elements of a criminal offence are committed using information communication technologies, the person shall be held criminally liable. At the same time, work is currently underway on the European Commission's directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which covers issues of crimes in the cyber environment using the development and capabilities of information communication technologies. When implementing the directive, Latvia will also have to assess the compliance of its legal framework with such cyber scope.

As of August 1, 2022, a new structural unit has been established within the Main Criminal Police Department of the State Police – the Cybercrime Combating Department, whose competence includes the prevention and combating of all types of cybercrimes, as well as the accumulation of knowledge and skills about newly discovered phenomena in the field of information technology.

State police has also provided various prevention activities regarding safe internet use for kids and young people, as well as cybercrime. For example, in 2020, the State Police in cooperation with NGO “Centrs Dardedze” and Latvia’s Safe Internet Centre⁷⁰ implemented awareness raising campaign “Different Faces of Child Sexual Abuse”, the aim of which was to draw the public’s attention to the issues of sexual violence against children, to promote wider awareness and recognition of this problem, as well as to reduce the latency of sexual violence. In 2022, State Police also completed work on the development of Interactive mock-ups for two age groups: (1) children in the age group of 8-10 and (2) children aged 11–14-year-old. Two different simulations have been developed, one of which was prepared on various risks in the Internet environment, including several topics on the possible risks of sexual exploitation and recommendations for recognizing and preventing this type of violence. The mentioned simulations are available on the State Police website www.manadrosiba.lv starting from September 2022, and will also be used as part of the Security Ambassadors awareness raising program.

To strengthen the approach to cases of child sexual and physical abuse, Latvia has also implemented the Barnahus model to ensure multi-disciplinary and interinstitutional cooperation for child victims or witnesses of violence thus improving the system of protection of children’s rights. On December 2023, the first Barnahus centre was opened where different professionals work under one roof in investigating suspected cases of child sexual abuse or other forms of violence against children and providing appropriate support for child victims, witnesses and their families. More than 40 professionals working with the Barnahus have been trained so far, and there are plans to create a therapy network of psychologists specialised in child abuse and trauma-informed care. State budget will be allocated to expand the Barnahus services to the other regions of Latvia by 2026. The opening

⁷⁰ www.drossinternets.lv

of the Barnahus was possible through the financial support of the EEA and Norway Grants in Latvia and the advice on operational issues by the Council of Europe.⁷¹

Cooperation with NGOs in the area of prevention and fight against domestic and gender-based violence, as well as gender equality in general has been crucial. Specialists from various NGOs are usually the ones who work with victims and perpetrators of domestic and gender-based violence. Relevant NGOs have been actively involved in the development of the National Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029, the Plan for Promoting Equal Rights and Opportunities for women and men 2021-2023 and many other policy documents. They also have been actively involved in the drafting of laws and amendments of laws in this area and have also been service providers for most of the activities in these areas.

As part of prevention and response to gender-based violence, the MoFA of Latvia has also financed projects in the Central Asia and Eastern Partnership countries that have been implemented by the NGO “Centre MARTA”.

As part of the projects implemented, practical support is provided to women and girls victims of sexual violence, several rehabilitation and support centres have been established in Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Support and expertise in developing legislation on violence against women has been provided. Psychological support has also been provided to survivors of the Belarusian political crackdown and their families.

Since 2019, the MoFA has funded NGO “Centre MARTA” projects linked to GBV totalling €675,091. Projects implemented with the MFA support:

Ukraine:

- 1) In 2022, the project “Asylum for Women and girl’s victims of War crimes”.
- 2) In 2022, the project “Supporting Women’s activism in Ukraine, promoting “Women, Peace and Security” policies.”
- 3) In 2023 and 2024, the project “Supporting Women's activism in Ukraine: promoting “Women, Peace and Security” policy”. Establishment of a system of assistance for victims of war crimes.
- 4) In 2023, THE JSC granted funding for the establishment of a women's rehabilitation centre in Chernihiv County, Ukraine, in cooperation with the Ukrainian civil society organisation “Eleos-Ukraine” to empower and support women affected by Russia's war in Ukraine.
- 5) In 2023, THE JSC granted funding for the establishment of a women's support centre in the city of Chernihiv (Ukraine) in cooperation with the Ukrainian civil society organisation “Chernihiv Network”.

In support of Belarusian civil society

- 1) In 2021, the project “Support for the repressed and their families”.

⁷¹ <https://www.lm.gov.lv/en/projects/support-barnahus-implementation-latvia>

In Uzbekistan:

- 1) In 2020, the project “Pandemic of violence during the global COVID-19 crisis. Risks, prevention, solutions”.
- 2) In 2021-2023, the project “Building capacity of local NGOs in providing public services to women and other vulnerable groups in rural areas”. Support for the establishment of Women's Advisory groups in 7 pilot centres.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan:

- 1) In 2019, the project “Voice of Women: Strengthening Women's participation in the Democratic processes and public Administration of Central Asian States”.
- 2) In 2020, the project “A pandemic of violence during the global COVID-19 crisis. Risks, prevention, solutions” (including in Uzbekistan).

Regarding future plans to fight and prevent gender-based and domestic violence MoW is planning to make an evaluation of the content of the social rehabilitation service for minor and adult victims of violence and prepare proposals for the improvement of these services, also implement new evidence-based methods to provide these services. Additionally, MoW is planning to make an evaluation of the possibility to receive social rehabilitation services anonymously for victims of violence, also to provide this service in prisons and social care places.

There are also plans to develop support centre for victims of sexual violence and rape in Latvia.

For persons with violent behaviour, MoW plans to make an evaluation of the effectiveness of the social rehabilitation service for perpetrators, improving the social rehabilitation program and training specialists who are working with perpetrators. No specialised support is available right now for minor perpetrators of violence, so MoW is planning to develop a social rehabilitation program for this target group.

Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

The legislation of Latvia ensures equal rights to both genders, nevertheless, representation of men and women in leading positions is not equal. The greatest differences may be observed in politics and the judicial system.

In recent years, representation of women in politics has risen significantly. Women accounted for almost one third of deputies elected to national parliament – Saeima – in 2022 (30 women out of 100 deputies or 30 %).⁷² Since September 15, 2023, the Prime Minister of Latvia is a woman. The Cabinet of Ministers (including Prime Minister) consists of 15 ministers, six of which are women (40%). Since Latvia regained its independence, the country has had 17 Prime Ministers, only two of which have been women. During the period, Latvia has had eight Presidents, only one of which was a woman.

⁷² <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6298-gender-equality-power-and>

Additionally, since September 20, 2023, Saeima Speaker position is taken by a woman. Since the restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia, Saeima in total has had 11 Speakers, five of which were women.

A relatively high share of women is also elected in local governments. In 2017's local government elections, 34 % of elected deputies were women but only each fourth local government (24.4 %) was headed by a woman. After the Riga City Council elections in 2020, the general local government elections in June 2021 and Varakļāni and Rēzekne municipality elections in September, a total of 30.5 % of all 43 municipal elected deputies were women. Nevertheless, municipal chairman positions are still dominated by men – only three local governments (7.0 %) are headed by a woman.⁷³

Regarding the proportion of women in senior civil servant positions in Latvia, there is some vertical gender segregation. Women usually tend to be specialists, experts or unit managers. For example, in 2023, only 36% of state secretaries were women, at the same time 79% of women were specialists and 76% of women were unit managers.

When it comes to the judicial system of Latvia – female judges are more common within the court system of Latvia – 81% of judges were women in 2022. Since 2012, this indicator has risen by 5 percentage points. The largest share of women is recorded in courts of first instance and regional courts. In 2022, women also constituted the majority of the notaries (87.7%) and out of all employees in the offices of prosecutors 60% were women. Women also accounted for a half of the Latvian advocates in 2022.⁷⁴

Regarding women in leadership positions in business, in 2023, among all the employees in Latvia, 53.5% of managers were women. Although this indicator is relatively high, only 23.9% of the representatives of the boards of Latvia's largest companies were women.⁷⁵

There is no quota system in place in Latvia to ensure women's participation in politics or other decision-making areas. The activities to ensure women's equal participation in public life and decision making in the last five years have been mostly awareness raising events on an ad-hoc basis. For example, in 2021 and 2022, there were Women's Leadership awards for those women whose leadership at regional level has made a significant contribution to society in general. A total of six awards were presented each year by Latvian Women's NGO Network – five for women leaders in historical Latvian regions of Riga, Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme and Latgale, and one for a female leader for Latvian diaspora.

There also have been capacity building projects for Roma women to strengthen their participation in public life. Each year within the scope of "Latvian Roma platform" projects (financed by EU funds) MoC organises capacity building seminars for Roma women. Since 2019, overall, 75 Roma women have participated in these seminars. The thematic scope of the seminars includes such topics as: facilitation of Roma women participation in the civil society and in the implementation of Roma

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6298-gender-equality-power-and>

⁷⁵ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6300-gender-equality>

inclusion policy at the national and regional levels; the benefits of participation in NGOs, including setting up Roma women's organisations; establishing cooperation networks to promote capacity building for Roma women and their participation in public life; implementing initiatives through participation in tenders for national and international programmes; raising Roma women awareness of sustainable communities. The seminars provide the opportunity for Roma women to share experiences and discuss best practices with the representatives of active Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian women activists and organisations, present ideas and initiatives, gain and improve effective communication, conflict resolution and social networking skills.

Each year, within the scope of "Latvian Roma platform", MoC also organises capacity building seminars for Roma youth "SĀRE KHETENE". Since 2019, overall, 20 Roma girls have participated in these seminars.

Within the scope of "Latvian Roma platform", Roma mediators services are also provided in municipalities. Roma mediators promote better dialogue between Roma families and municipal institutions (schools, social services, the municipal administration), as well as with state agencies.

Various activities to fight gender-based stereotypes around women's and girls' leadership have also been included in the Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2021-2023. For example, leadership training for girls was organised for students of 9th- 12th grades and for vocational education students.

When it comes to strengthening the legislation to facilitate women's participation in decision making positions, the MoJ has proposed to amend the Commercial Law, providing for a special leave for executive board members with childcare responsibilities, which marks significant progress in promoting women's opportunities in the corporate sector. This initiative is crucial because it addresses the need for greater work-life balance and gender equality in leadership positions. By allowing executive board members, including women, to take parental leave without forfeiting their responsibilities, the proposed regulation acknowledges the unique challenges that women face in balancing their professional and family lives.

This initiative is particularly important for women, as it addresses the gender disparities prevalent in corporate governance. By enabling women to take parental leave without repercussions on their career advancement, the proposed regulation aims to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for women in leadership positions.

This initiative is currently in the legislative process and is expected to be reviewed by the Parliament, with plans for the amendments to the Commercial Law regarding the utilisation of parental leave for executive board members to potentially come into effect as early as 2024.

To further contribute to fostering women's participation in company boards, MoW right now is working on a new law to transpose Directive 2022/238 on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies and related measures. It will set in place a mechanism to ensure gender-balanced executive and non-executive boards of publicly listed large companies.

When it comes to media and journalism there have not been any particular activities aimed at fostering gender-equality in this area. Nevertheless, there has been an active discussion facilitated by the public

media and the public media ombudsman of Latvia about gender equality issues in Latvian media. For example, a private study done in 2024 shows that only about one-third of the participants in various Latvian Public Television (LTV) and Latvian Public Radio (LR) discussions on issues of public importance are women.⁷⁶

Regarding national gender equality machinery, there have been no major changes since the last reporting period. As mentioned before, Latvia has chosen an integrated approach to ensure gender equality, which means that gender equality should be seen as a horizontal principle that fits into all sectoral policies defined in the country at all stages of their development and implementation, involving all stakeholders and partners.

Coordination of equal opportunities and rights policies for women and men is the responsibility of the MoW, which include the following: 1) clarification of gender equality principles for other public administration institutions; 2) involvement in the development of policy planning documents of other public administration institutions; 3) identification of the areas where different treatment on the basis of gender is observed; 4) developing a comprehensive vision of equal opportunities and rights for women and men. In addition, the MoW regularly monitors that sectoral ministries, when planning inter-ministry policies and policies in their areas of responsibility, take into account the different situations and circumstances, needs and equal opportunities of women and men (within the initial impact assessments, within planning documents).

Since 2021, there is a Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 617 “Procedure for evaluating the initial impact of the draft legal act”, which stipulates that in the assessment of the initial impact of the draft legal act gender equality situation must be taken into account.⁷⁷

The integration of the gender aspect in budget processes has not been systematically practised and implemented in Latvia.

The MoW also monitors the observance of the horizontal principle of the EU Funds "Equal Opportunities" in the planning, implementation and monitoring of EU projects, including ensuring that, during the preparation and implementation of the fund programmes equality between men and women, and mainstreaming of gender equality, are taken into account and promoted.

A Gender Equality committee has been set up to promote cooperation and participation of ministries, NGOs, social partners, municipalities and other stakeholders, as well as to promote the implementation, monitoring and development of gender equality policies. The said committee has a key role to play in defining gender equality policy priorities and action lines, as well as in monitoring the implementation of gender equality policies in other sectoral policies. The Committee usually comes together every 3 months.

Other institutions and organisations also play an important role in promoting equal opportunities and rights for women and men. For example, the State Labour Inspectorate (SLI) implements state supervision and control in the field of labour relations and labour protection, the Ombudsman

⁷⁶ <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/features/media/22.05.2024-study-men-dominate-discussion-on-latvian-public-media.a554934/>

⁷⁷ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/325945-tiesibu-akta-projekta-sakotnejas-ietekmes-izvertesanas-kartiba>

monitors compliance with the principle of equal treatment and promotes the elimination of all forms of discrimination and promotes public awareness of human rights and their protection, CSB collects, processes and analyses statistical information on gender equality issues, Society Integration Foundation financially supports and promotes social integration and inclusive labour market policies. The non-governmental sector, which promotes public awareness of gender equality issues, also plays an important role in policy planning, implementing and monitoring.

As mentioned above, the national human rights institution that also addresses violations of women's rights and promotes gender equality is the Ombudsman's Office. The Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia is the national human rights institution and its mandate includes promotion of compliance with the principles of equal treatment and prevention of any kind of discrimination. Promotion of gender equality and prevention of discrimination based on gender is encompassed by the universal mandate of the Ombudsman.

Promotion of equal treatment, including gender equality, and prevention of all types of discrimination remains to comprise an important part of the agenda of the Ombudsman's Office. To strengthen and increase the Ombudsman's capacity in the afore-mentioned areas, on 1 January 2024, a new section - the Discrimination Prevention Division – was established within the office.

In 2020, the Ombudsman joined as *amicus curiae* the proceedings before the Constitutional Court, concerning the conformity of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence with the provisions of the Constitution. The Ombudsman stressed the importance of the Convention as a legal instrument, containing legally binding obligations specifically addressed to prevent gender-based violence. The Ombudsman drew attention that domestic violence in Latvia unfortunately remains quite widespread due to the deeply entrenched gender stereotypes and due to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related lockdowns resulting in the rise of domestic violence incidents and violence against women. On 4 June 2021, the Constitutional Court declared that the Convention was in conformity with the Constitution. On 16 January 2023, in his letter to the Parliament, the Ombudsman repeatedly reiterated the importance of the Convention as a legal instrument and binding treaty, referred to the afore-said conclusions of the Constitutional Court and invited to ratify the Convention.⁷⁸

In the same year, the Ombudsman conducted research on discrimination in the area of employment.⁷⁹ The results revealed discriminatory practices in job advertisements, which addressed specifically men or women. Also, female respondents considered that they were more often than their male counterparts subjected to discrimination based on gender, health and family status.

In 2021 – 2022, the Ombudsman criticised sexism in commercial advertisements. Discussions and debates involving representatives of the executive, consumer protection authorities, NGOs and representatives of the academic community were held to tackle issues related to gender bias,

⁷⁸ Letter of the Ombudsman to the Parliament “Concerning the necessary improvements to the legal framework”, 16.01.2023. <https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/resource/vestule-saeimai-par-nepieciemamam-uzlabojumiem-tiesiskaja-regulejuma/>

⁷⁹ https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/diskriminacija_darba_vide_2020_petijuma_rezultati_1594374193.pdf

stereotypes and sexism in commercial advertisements with a view to raise the awareness among the public, identify sexist advertisements and examine the applicable legal framework. Among other findings, it was established that the existing media self-regulatory measures have proved to be insufficient and ineffective, and there remains a gap within the applicable legal framework, since it does not expressly condemn sexist advertisements as an unacceptable practice and one of the forms of gender-based discrimination. Subsequently, in 2023, the Ombudsman responded to sexist and gender-biased comments on mass media platforms, which targeted women employed at decision-making positions. The Ombudsman reiterated that mass media have an obligation to monitor their comment sections to prevent and remedy hate speech and discriminatory remarks. The Ombudsman also stressed that mass media should exercise caution when indiscriminately republishing sexist statements made by the politicians, so as not to allow such statements to gain wider publicity.

In 2022, the Ombudsman in the verification procedure established systemic discrimination due to gender in the medical field. According to the applicable Cabinet Regulations, a medical practitioner's certificate confirming their ability to independently engage in medical treatment is issued for a period of five years. Following the expiry of this period, the medical practitioner must perform recertification. However, recertification cannot be applied if the medical practitioner has performed professional activity for less than three years during the period of validity of the certificate. In the present situation, the female doctor could not recertify because she exercised the right to use pregnancy related leave twice during the period of validity of the certificate. Thus, to continue her professional activity, she had to obtain a new certificate by taking the examinations and bearing the costs thereof. In response to the recommendations issued by the Ombudsman, discrimination was eliminated.

In 2022, the Ombudsman examined the vocational training in digital expertise, which was a project provided exclusively to younger women aged 18 to 29. The Ombudsman established that the aim of this training was to enhance digital competency and skills, promote specific innovative partnerships and solutions, and to increase the employment rate within the target group which is considered by the Digital Agenda for Europe as being one of the vulnerable "digital" groups in Europe. In that regard, the Ombudsman concluded that such positive actions and trainings can be considered as examples of "positive discrimination" and as such they do not amount to discriminatory practices or unequal treatment. The aims of such activities - reduction and prevention of inequality - have been recognized by the international human rights documents as being legitimate, as they are targeting such groups or individuals who throughout history have faced discrimination, for example, women who have faced barriers to education and employment. During the project follow-up in 2023, the State Employment Agency and the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia confirmed the success of its implementation, as the project had succeeded in raising the digital knowledge among young women and 73% of its participants found new employment opportunities.

In 2023, the Ombudsman established systemic discrimination due to gender in the verification procedure when the Latvian Council of Science, the MoES and the MoF created obstacles for female scientists to fully use pregnancy related leave in the projects financed by the EU structural funds. In response to the recommendations issued by the Ombudsman, discrimination was eliminated.

In 2024, the Ombudsman organised the informative educational campaign “Spark Your Empathy”. This campaign consisted of ten video debates, dedicated to topics related to specific facets and types of discrimination. The participants, who belonged to different social groups, including vulnerable groups, shared experiences of their every-day lives and interactions with other people. The topics which were chosen for awareness raising and educational purposes included mental health, nationality, age, visual and auditory impairments, sexual orientation, language, gender, social status, and religion.

In March 2024, the Ombudsman commenced the inquiry into the allegations of sexual harassment in the higher education institutions. The Ombudsman is examining the existing legal and institutional framework and administrative procedures available for the victims of sexual harassment, and effectiveness and impartiality of the academic institutions charged with examining such complaints and the possible outcomes for those found liable in terms of disciplinary, administrative, or criminal liability.

Peaceful and inclusive societies

The Latvian Government, in collaboration with line ministries and non-governmental organisations, are currently implementing the National Action Plan “On Women, Peace, and Security” for the period 2020-2025 (hereafter – NAP). The NAP focuses on three main areas: 1) raising awareness about gender equality and combating gender-based violence, especially among the younger generation; 2) integrating gender equality aspects within the Latvian defence and internal affairs sectors; and 3) sharing Latvia’s experience and knowledge through development cooperation projects in Ukraine, Central Asia, and elsewhere. The NAP is currently undergoing a midterm review, which will assess past actions, address lessons learned, identify areas that require particular focus and further action/implementation measures within the existing NAP, as well as the still outstanding issues.

Furthermore, Latvia has chosen to emphasise the promotion of women’s rights and opportunities, including the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, internationally, as a key priority in the upcoming United Nations Security Council elections for the non-permanent seat from 2026 to 2027. Should Latvia be elected, these commitments will persist throughout its term. Latvia will especially address the issue of armed-conflict related sexual violence.

Latvia is also elected to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), where Latvia has held the vice-presidency at the Bureau of the CSW. Latvia works in the Executive Board of the UN WOMEN and is a part of several UN Groups of Friends related to the topic, such as the Group of Friends on Women, Peace and Security. These formats serve as platforms to advance the topic of accelerating progress for women and girls nationally and globally.

As for communication, in connection with the NAP, the MoFA has a communication plan which includes “goodwill ambassadors” or well-known people in Latvia who have agreed to communicate on social media platforms about the Women, Peace and Security agenda through their perspective and their career. The people who take up the “goodwill ambassador” position have changed through time, but notable “goodwill ambassadors” have included women diplomats, entrepreneurs, women in

the military service, the ex-Chief of the Latvian State Police. The NAP's communication plan is in the process of being updated.

Latvia also regularly includes the Women, Peace and Security agenda as an important discussion topic in large scale international events in Latvia, such as the Riga Conference, which is an annual meeting of regional and international experts in foreign policy and defence, academics, journalists, and business representatives, promoting the discussion and assessment of issues affecting the transatlantic community. The Riga Conference has been organised annually since 2006 and in the last couple of years it has hosted a panel discussion on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Latvia aims to continue this practice further on. At the beginning of June 2024, the MoFA will organise an international forum on the relations between Latvia and African countries, where experts from the governmental and non-governmental sectors will share their experiences in implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda in their respective regions.

When it comes to women's participation in leadership conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response, Latvia has a relatively high proportion of women in armed forces – 16% of Latvia's active service soldiers are women, which is above the average NATO indicator. As of July 2023, there are 16% of women in professional service and 19% of women in national guardsmen service. Additionally, the application process for the officials of the institutions of the MoI with a special rank for peace missions is the same for both women and men. Currently two female police officers are assigned to the EU monitoring mission in Georgia.

There also have been various awareness raising activities to promote women's visibility and opportunities in the armed forces and security sector. For example, in 2023 the Public Relations Council of MoD approved the production of the short film "Women, Peace and Security", which will reflect on the role of women serving in the combat group in National Armed Forces (NBS) and in NATO's structures.

Additionally, in connection with Latvia's NAP, in the fall of 2022, the MoFA and NGO Latvian Transatlantic Organisation (LATO) organised a special mentoring program for young professionals, who wish to further their careers in the fields of security and foreign affairs. This mentoring program provided the opportunity to connect with women-professionals in the field of security and foreign affairs, the possibility to network, and to gain theoretical knowledge through seminars and discussions.

In parallel to the mentoring program, a negotiation training program/workshop "Negotiation training for women leaders" was held by the MoFA, LATO, the Clingendael Academy, and the Embassy of Germany in Riga. The program was open for women participants from the Baltic region. The program was conducted on 12-13 November 2022, in Riga, Latvia. The training targeted female-professionals from security and foreign affairs sectors with prior working experience. There were 17 chosen participants. The training involved theoretical lectures, practical exercises and simulations to allow the participants to build their capacity as negotiators and leaders in their respective fields. The goal was to ensure women's participation and further engagement at the negotiation table in the defence, security and foreign affairs sectors.

All participants successfully finished the two-day negotiation training with the Clingendael Academy expert and received certificates. Both the participants and the trainer left positive feedback during the oral feedback session at the end of the workshop.

Additionally, to the training a round-table discussion on negotiation experiences of a Latvian politician and a diplomacy expert was hosted the evening before the training. This discussion also gathered women from the mentoring program mentioned above.

These activities were an important basis for an establishment of an informal network of women that are students, early-career professionals, women working in NGOs, academia, civil service, in military service, as diplomats, academia, etc. Informal events for said network are still often organised by LATO and NGO “Women for Security”.

The MoFA has also provided financing to several development cooperation projects that promote women’s participation in public life and decision-making, such as the 2019 project in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan “The voice of Women: Strengthening Women's participation in the Democratic processes and public Administration of Central Asian States” and 2021-2023 project in Uzbekistan “Building capacity of local NGOs in providing public services to women and other vulnerable groups in rural areas”.

Due to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Women, Peace and Security agenda has been particularly important, and it had to be adjusted to the current circumstances. Latvia supported the common efforts to update Ukraine’s National Action Plan on implementation of UNSCR 1325 to reflect the current challenges. Furthermore, Latvia is providing support on documenting Russia’s war crimes according to international law and best practice to bring the perpetrators to justice. These efforts include the creation of a mobile group to facilitate the documentation of war crimes and to organise practical, psychological, legal, medical assistance for victims of conflict-related sexual violence. With the support of the MoFA, the NGO “Centre MARTA” together with local NGOs from Ukraine, has opened overall three women’s support centres in Ukraine (two – in Chernihiv, opened in 2023; one – in Ivano-Frankivsk (Western Ukraine), opened in 2022).

Latvia has also stepped up its efforts to effectively fight human trafficking, which is a serious human rights violation and poses many security threats. On September 28, 2021 the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the “Plan for the Prevention of Human Trafficking 2021-2023”⁸⁰. The measures set out in the plan were designed to tackle human trafficking as effectively as possible. The Plan included a total of 31 actions divided into four thematic directions: (1) Prevention, which includes training and education programs, awareness-raising campaigns, public and private sector policies, protection measures for those who have experienced trafficking; (2) Protection, which includes legislation measures on the protection and rights of victims, the provision of social services and victim management, accommodation, medical treatment, mental health services, information, legal services, training and education programs, clothing and food, translation services, education on self-care and self-service skills, support in employment issues and reintegration into society; (3) Prosecution of perpetrators to obtain and investigate information and prosecute those involved in trafficking

⁸⁰ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/326420-par-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-noversanas-planu-2021-2023-gadam>

offences; (4) Partnerships with private sector, public and municipal sector that help to promote leadership, diversity, trust building and individual-oriented sustainability, and effective communication measures. A total of more than 20 state and non-governmental organisations are involved in the implementation of the Action Plan, and most of the measures are implemented within the framework of the state budget, as well as by implementing measures within the framework of various projects.

From 2021 to 2023, the MoI participated as a partner in the project “Strengthened cooperation of law enforcement authorities and improved training on human trafficking” (ELECT THB) funded by the EU Internal Security Fund. Within the project, two seminars were organised in Latvia in 2023 for specialists on human trafficking for sexual exploitation, covering topics such as trends in the field of sexual exploitation, vulnerabilities, children in out-of-home care, sexual exploitation on the internet, etc. Additionally, in 2023, an international seminar on human trafficking for sexual exploitation was organised in Riga, where an approach centred on the needs of the victim was emphasised.

In 2023, in cooperation with other structural units of the State Police and various institutions, including State Labour Inspectorate, Riga Municipal Police, State Border Guard, State Security Service and State Revenue Service, several EMPACT THB Joint Action Day events were implemented with a focus on labour exploitation, sexual exploitation of children and third-country nationals, as well as sexual exploitation and coercion to commit crimes.

Since 2022, the State police also continues active preventive measures to prevent and fight the exposure of persons (especially minors and Ukrainian civilians) to human trafficking.

Regarding activities to promote and protect the rights of the girl child, please see other sections in this report.

Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

During the reporting period, Latvia has not implemented measures aimed to promote gender-mainstreaming when it comes to environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation, as well as agriculture policy and climate change.

As part of their EU Gender Equality Index 2023 EIGE focused on the socially fair transition of the European Green Deal.⁸¹ This thematic focus analyses the following aspects: public attitudes and behaviours on climate change and mitigation, energy, transport and decision-making.

As data showed, women in Latvia were more likely to avoid animal products, single-use plastic products and more often chose environmentally friendly options in childcare activities, as well as in housework activities. Women also more often than men choose low carbon-emission modes of transport and use public transit as their main means of transportation during a typical week.

⁸¹ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/thematic-focus/green-deal/country/LV>

When it comes to decision making in this area in Latvia, women make up 43% of senior administrators in national ministries dealing with environment and climate change, but only 8% of parliamentary committee members dealing with environment and climate change issues are women.

Section IV: National institutions and processes

As mentioned before in Section II of this report, the main planning document for gender equality policy in this time period was Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2021 – 2023. The aim of the plan was to ensure an integrated, targeted and effective policy that promotes equal rights and opportunities for women and men. To achieve this goal, three directions of action were set: (1) equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the labour market and education; (2) prevention of domestic violence and gender-based violence; (3) strengthening gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies. The overall planned funding for the activities of the Plan was 905 727 EUR.

Regarding activities to promote equal rights and opportunities for women and men, the main focus was on activities to foster work-life balance, fight discrimination within the labour market, reduce stereotypes about career and educational choices for young people, as well as inform policy makers, employers and employees about pay transparency issues and foster inclusive employment environment.

In the area of prevention of domestic violence and gender-based violence the main focus was on the prevention work, especially with young people. MoW together with various NGOs organised informational activities about various types of gender-based and domestic violence, as well as discussion workshops for young people on how to build non-violent relationships based on gender equality and free of harmful stereotypes.

When it comes to strengthening gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies the activities were concentrated around capacity building, including gender equality in ex ante evaluations and dissemination of information about gender mainstreaming in such sectors as social work and justice. Unfortunately, the achievement of this priority is still one of the main challenges in Latvia when it comes to full gender equality mainstreaming in all sectoral policies and the introduction of gender budgeting.

The plan also makes a significant contribution to the achievement of the fifth UN Sustainable Development Goal "Gender Equality" by working towards such targets as:

- 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere;
- 5.2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres;
- 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate;
- 5.5 Ensure women's full participation and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life;
- 5.b enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote empowerment of women.

The evaluation process of the Plan for the period of 2021-2023 is in process right now and it will be completed by July of this year. Additionally, as mentioned before, MoW is working on its next Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-2027. The aim of the plan is to continue to ensure an integrated, targeted and effective policy that promotes equal rights and opportunities for women and men. It is planned that it will be approved by June of 2024.

When it comes to funding of gender equality issues – there is no permanent/constant state budget available that is foreseen for promotion of gender equality. The measures are being implemented within the framework of the “existing approved budget”, attracting foreign financial assistance or funding within the framework of the budget or activities specified by other public administration institutions.

Additionally, as mentioned before, there is no official gender-budgeting practice established in Latvia. During the last ten years, only a few ad-hoc activities have been implemented in Latvia in connection with the integration of the aspect of gender-equality in the budget processes. One of the most comprehensive activities was implemented in 2017 where, within a context of an EU funded project, the evaluation of individual budget programs of state and local governments was carried out on the basis of which recommendations and methodology proposals were developed.⁸² Based on the results and recommendations of the project changes were made to the Cabinet of Ministers’ instruction No. 2 “Instruction the analysis of the state budget execution”⁸³, where it was determined that within the context of budget analysis it is necessary to indicate performance indicators by gender, if the unit of measurement of the performance indicator is the number of persons and if such information is available in the internal records of ministries.

Regarding formal mechanisms for participation of different stakeholders in the area of gender-equality, which also includes implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the corresponding targets of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a Gender Equality committee has been set up to promote cooperation and participation of ministries, NGOs, social partners, municipalities and other stakeholders, as well as to promote the implementation, monitoring and development of gender equality policies. The said committee has a key role to play in defining gender equality policy priorities and action lines, as well as in monitoring the implementation of gender equality policies in other sectoral policies. The Committee usually comes together every 3 months. Participants of the Committee will also be informed on the progress of this report and have made contributions to this report on the information request made officially by the MoW.

When it comes to implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Convention) has been in force in the Republic of Latvia since 14 May 1992. On 15 June 2003, Latvia submitted its combined initial, second and third periodic report (the Initial Report) on implementation of the Convention for the period until 1 January 2002 to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee), which

⁸² <https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/media/154/download>

⁸³ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/298289-instrukcija-par-valsts-budzeta-izpildes-analizi>

examined the Initial Report in July 2004 at its 31st session.⁸⁴ During the same session, the Committee adopted its concluding observations on the Initial Report providing recommendations in areas such as legislation, awareness-raising, media, welfare, law-enforcement, employment, health-care, and other areas.⁸⁵

On 7 December 2018, Latvia submitted its combined fourth to seventh periodic report on implementation of the Convention in Latvia (the Report) to the Committee covering the period from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2017 and including information on actions taken by Latvia s.⁸⁶ The Report was considered by the Committee in February 2020 at its 1749th and 1750th meetings. After the examination of the Report, on 10 February 2020, the Committee adopted the Concluding observations on the Report providing recommendations in areas such as access to justice, legislation, awareness-raising, national policy-making, national humans rights institutions, law-enforcement, education, employment, health-care and other areas.⁸⁷ In its Concluding observations, the Committee requested Latvia to provide within two years written information on the steps taken to implement recommendations regarding comprehensive gender equality strategy, a comprehensive law on gender-based violence against women, procedures for the early identification of victims of trafficking in human beings, and regulations with respect to women and girls with disabilities. On 22 March 2022, Latvia submitted the requested follow-up information on the said recommendations (the Follow-up).⁸⁸ On 4 July 2022, the Committee adopted an assessment of the Follow-up. Latvia is currently in the process of preparation of its eighth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention.

The gender equality in economic, social and cultural rights is set out in Article 3 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the Covenant) that has been in force in Latvia since 14 July 1992. On 1 August 2005, Latvia submitted its initial report on the implementation of the Covenant for the time period until 1 January 2002 providing information on the historic development of the understanding about gender equality, domestic legal framework on gender equality, and activities undertaken by Latvia to promote gender equality.⁸⁹ On 7 January 2008, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the CESCR) adopted concluding observations on the initial report of Latvia on implementation of the Covenant providing recommendations, *inter alia*, regarding the adoption of a law on gender equality, full and equal participation of women in the labour market and political life, as well as regarding the progress in the

⁸⁴ The combined initial, second and third periodic report of Latvia on implementation of the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women for the period until 1 January 2002 (CEDAW/C/LVA/1-3), available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FLVA%2F1-3&Lang=en.

⁸⁵ A/59/38(SUPP) paras.30-79, available at: [https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F59%2F38\(SUPP\)&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F59%2F38(SUPP)&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False).

⁸⁶ The combined fourth to seventh periodic report of Latvia on implementation of the Convention (CEDAW/C/LVA/4-7), available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FLVA%2F4-7&Lang=en.

⁸⁷ The Committee's concluding observations on the Report (CEDAW/C/LVA/CO/4-7), available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FLVA%2FCO%2F4-7&Lang=en.

⁸⁸ Latvia's report on follow-up to the concluding observations on the Report (CEDAW/C/LVA/FCO/4-7); available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FLVA%2FFCO%2F4-7&Lang=en.

⁸⁹ The initial report of Latvia on the implementation of the Covenant (E/1990/5/Add.70): https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2F1990%2F5%2FAdd.70&Lang=en.

field of gender equality.⁹⁰ On 3 April 2019, Latvia submitted to the CESCR its combined second to sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Covenant that contained information on the said recommendations.⁹¹ Further, in response to the list of issues adopted by the CESCR, on 6 July 2020, Latvia provided additional information on the equal rights of men and women.⁹² On 30 March 2021, the CESCR adopted concluding observations on the report of Latvia providing recommendations with respect to equality between men and women, *i.e.*, regarding gender pay gap, promotion of increased representation of women at all levels of public administration and in management in the private sector.⁹³

⁹⁰ The CESCR concluding observations on the initial report of Latvia (E/C.12/LVA/CO/1), available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FLVA%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en.

⁹¹ The combined second to sixth periodic report of Latvia on implementation of the Covenant (E/C.12/LVA/2), available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FLVA%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en.

⁹² Replies of Latvia to the list of issues in relation to its second periodic report (E/C.12/LVA/RQ/2), available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FLVA%2FRQ%2F2&Lang=en.

⁹³ The CESCR concluding observations on the second report of Latvia (E/C.12/LVA/CO/2), available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FLVA%2FCO%2F2&Lang=en.

Section V: Data and statistics

Regarding data and statistics, the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) of Latvia continues to work on providing data on gender equality, social protection and public services. Work on the improvement of the separate Gender Equality Section⁹⁴ in the Official Statistics Portal (Official Statistics of Latvia) has continued. The section uses data from the Official Statistics portal database, therefore, for deeper analysis of gender statistics a database is available. Besides the portal, CSB of Latvia uses social media (X, Facebook) to develop infographics that promote gender equality data.

Since 2021, the Gender Equality section and portal data tables have been supplemented with new indicators of social protection by gender - average amount of old-age and disability pensions, guardianship of persons with limited legal capacity, distribution of the number of recipients of old-age pensions according to the average size of the granted pension, beneficiaries by gender, as well as published results of the 2020 agricultural census on farm managers by gender.

In 2022, CSB published the results of the survey “Gender based violence survey”⁹⁵ conducted in 2021 at the Official Statistics Portal. It covered personal safety and experience with unwanted behaviour at work, in society, partnership, family and childhood. The published results included statistics for prevalence of such behaviour in Latvia – interpersonal violence (psychological, physical and sexual), sexual harassment at workplace, violence in childhood, stalking, and other violence-related indicators.

Additionally, in 2023, CSB published an informative overview “Gender Equality 2023”⁹⁶, which summarises the latest statistics for gender equality and gender-gaps from various perspectives: knowledge, work and earnings, time, health, power and violence.

CSB of Latvia plans to continue working with promotion of gender equality data by regular updates on Gender Equality section in Official Statistics portal and by reviewing new data sources to extend the available data both in Gender Equality section and database. CSB of Latvia will also continue to develop user-friendly infographics and press releases by highlighting gender equality issues – this cooperation with MoW and other line ministries is also included in the new Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-2027. Additionally, within the Labour Force Survey 2025, a module “Reconciliation of work and family life” will be included.

⁹⁴ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality-0>

⁹⁵ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/population/crimes/publications-and-infographics/10940-prevalence-violence-2021>

⁹⁶ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/publications-and-5>

When it comes to data disaggregation in major surveys, geographic location, sex, age, marital status and ethnicity is available over administrative data and can be connected to respondents. According to the survey's methodology, income is asked or available via administrative data. Information on education is also available, depending on the survey and according to its methodology. There are no routinely asked questions on disability, there are only questions on health issues.

Regarding Sustainable Development Goals, in 2022, the second Latvian Report⁹⁷ to the United Nations on the implementation of SDGs was prepared and presented. The report reflected the work done and to be done in Latvia in the implementation of SDGs and informed about good practices, provided public opinions on priority topics, and also revealed future challenges. The report also included a statistical annex, which was prepared with the support of CSB. It was based on official statistics available from CSB and other national agencies and international organisations.

Nevertheless, in 2023, the State Audit Office of the Republic of Latvia published a review on SDG processes in Latvia⁹⁸. It noted that a regular and systematic monitoring of SDG progress is not carried out in Latvia. Although the progress of SDG implementation has been summarised twice by preparing two Latvia's reports to the UN on SDG implementation, there are no established procedures or plans for monitoring the progress of SDG implementation. Latvia submits data to Eurostat regularly, and statistical data are available both on the Official Statistics Portal and on various institutional websites and databases, some of which are also related to SDG dimensions, but regular information about the progress of achieving Latvia's SDGs is not generally available to citizens in one place neither in public reports, not on websites. Ministries also do not draft reports regularly on how the policies implemented by them help to achieve the SDGs. There are also challenges in the availability of data necessary for the evaluation of SDG progress both at the national and municipal levels, as data is only available for measuring 57% of SDG progress indicators in Latvia according to the UN assessment.

⁹⁷ https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/Latvia%202nd%20VNR_2022.pdf

⁹⁸ <https://www.lrvk.gov.lv/en/audit-summaries/audit-summaries/are-the-preconditions-created-in-latvia-for-achieving-the-un-sustainable-development-goals>

Section VI: Conclusions and next steps

Since 2020, there have been significant changes and achievements in Latvia in the context of gender equality within the area of promotion of work-life balance, fight against gender-based and domestic violence, as well as fight against poverty and equal treatment within the labour market.

Nevertheless, many challenges persist that hinder a faster progress in Latvia towards full gender-equality. Throughout the review process, the main emerging challenge in the area of gender equality policy is the lack of gender mainstreaming in all sectoral policies and also the lack of awareness about gender-equality issues in other line ministries, especially in the areas that are not typically associated with gender equality and social issues.

In order to further promote gender-mainstreaming in all policy areas, through the support of EU funding, MoW is developing a training programme for civil servants and public officials of local governments to enhance their capacity to integrate equal opportunities and non-discrimination principles into policy planning, implementation and evaluation processes. One of the training modules in this programme will be dedicated to gender equality issues and best practices of gender-mainstreaming and gender-budgeting. This activity will be done within the new programming period for EU Funds 2021-2027 and it will be implemented from 2024 till 2029.

The fight against persistent gender-based negative stereotypes about gender roles is also crucial to accelerate progress towards gender equality and inclusive society. Fundamental changes in this area are usually slow and require a lot of awareness raising and educational activities. To foster this change in the society, MoW plans to implement a comprehensive awareness raising campaign for the next 5 years on various discrimination aspects, including discrimination based on gender, and how to protect your rights against discrimination.

Even though Latvia has had some significant achievements fighting gender-based and domestic violence in recent years – it is still a widespread phenomenon in Latvian society, which is often tolerated by other members of the society. To fight and prevent gender-based and domestic violence Latvia has planned various comprehensive activities in this area, for example, the completion and implementation of the first National Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029, work towards and uphold the goals of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, improvement and introduction of new services for victims and perpetrators of violence, as well as transposition and implementation in national level of the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

It is also important to continue and strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation on gender-equality issues with different stakeholders to improve the gender-mainstreaming situation, as well as to effectively implement the goals of 2030 Agenda and Beijing Platform for Action.

Annex I

Table 1. Amounts of minimum income benefits and minimum pensions.

State social security benefit					
For persons with disabilities					
Disability group	Coefficient	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2020.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2021.	Amount in EUR from 01.07.2023.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2024.
Since childhood					
Group I	1,4 ⁹⁹	159,50	190,40	219, 80	239, 40
unemployed ¹⁰⁰		159,50	247, 52	285, 74	311, 22
Group II	1,2	147,23	163,20	188, 40	205, 20
unemployed ¹⁰¹		147,23	195, 84	226, 08	246, 24
Group III	Base ₁₀₂	122,69	136	157	171
Other persons with disabilities					
Group I	1,4 ¹⁰³	104	152,60	175	191, 80
unemployed ¹⁰⁴		104	198,38	227, 50	249, 34
Group II	1,2	96	130,80	150	164, 40
unemployed ¹⁰⁵		96	156,96	180	197, 28
Group III	Base ₁₀₆	80	109	125	137
For persons who have reached retirement age					

⁹⁹ In 2020 coefficient 1.3. Coefficient was increased to 1.4 from 2021.

¹⁰⁰ + 30% additional payment to the amount defined for Group I Disability.

¹⁰¹ + 20% additional payment to the amount defined for Group II Disability.

¹⁰² 25 % of the income median

¹⁰³ In 2020 coefficient 1.3. Coefficient was increased to 1.4 from 2021.

¹⁰⁴ + 30% additional payment to the amount defined for Group I Disability.

¹⁰⁵ + 20% additional payment to the amount defined for Group II Disability.

¹⁰⁶ 20 % of the income median

Amount in EUR from 01.01.2020.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2021.	Amount in EUR from 01.07.2023.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2024.		
64,03	109 ¹⁰⁷	125	137		
In case of loss of survivor	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2020.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2021.	Amount in EUR from 01.07.2023.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2024.	
Until age of ¹⁰⁸	92,50 / 106,72 ¹⁰⁹	136	157	171	
From 7 years of age ¹¹⁰	111,00	163	188	206	
Minimum pensions					
Minimum old age pension calculation base ¹¹¹					
	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2020.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2021.	Amount in EUR from 01.07.2023.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2024.	
For persons of retirement age	80	136 ¹¹²	157	171	
For persons with disability since childhood	122,69	163 ¹¹³	188	206	
Minimum disability pension					
	Coefficient	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2020.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2021.	Amount in EUR from 01.07.2023.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2024.
Since childhood					
Group I	1.6	196,30	260,80	300,8	329, 60
Group II	1.4	171, 77	228,20	263,2	288, 40
Group III	Base ¹¹⁴	122,69	163	188	206
Other persons with disabilities					

¹⁰⁷ 20 % of the income median

¹⁰⁸ 25 % of the income median

¹⁰⁹ Until 2021 the state social security amount in case if loss of provider was higher for children with disabilities until 7 years of age.

¹¹⁰ 30 % of the income median

¹¹¹ Applying to the old-age pension calculation base a coefficient of 1.1 and, for each subsequent year, exceeding the length of pensionable service required for the granting of an old-age pension, increasing the amount by 2% from the minimum old-age pension calculation base.

¹¹² 25 % of the income median

¹¹³ 30 % of the income median

¹¹⁴ 30 % of the income median

Group I	1.6	128	217,60	251,2	273, 60
Group II	1.4	112	190,40	219,8	239, 40
Group III	Base ¹¹⁵	80	136	157	171
In case of loss of survivor	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2020.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2021.	Amount in EUR from 01.07.2023.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2024.	
Until age of 7 ¹¹⁶	92,50 / 106,72 ¹¹⁷	136	157	171	
From 7 years of age ¹¹⁸	111,00	163	188	206	
Minimum income thresholds in social assistance ¹¹⁹					
	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2020.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2021.	Amount in EUR from 01.07.2023.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2024.	
Guaranteed minimum income threshold	64	109 ¹²⁰ / 76	125 / 87,50	137 / 96	
Needy household income threshold	128,06	272 ¹²¹ / 190	313 / 219	343 / 240	
Low-income household income threshold (maximum threshold)	430	436 ¹²² / 305	501 / 351	549 / 384	
Minimum income thresholds for an orphan who has reached the age of majority and the child left without parental care after out-of-family care					
	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2020.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2021.	Amount in EUR from 01.07.2023.	Amount in EUR from 01.01.2024.	

¹¹⁵ 25 % of the income median

¹¹⁶ 25 % of the income median

¹¹⁷ Until 2021 the state social security amount in case if loss of provider was higher for children with disabilities until 7 years of age.

¹¹⁸ 30 % of the income median

¹¹⁹ Equivalence scales are applied in social assistance: for the first and single person household an equivalence scale 1, for the rest persons - 0.7

¹²⁰ 20 % of the income median

¹²¹ 50 % of the income median

¹²² 80 % of the income median

One-off allowance for starting an independent life	128,06	218 ¹²³	251	274
One-off allowance for starting an independent life for a young person with disability since childhood	245,38	327 ¹²⁴	376	411
Allowance for monthly expenses	64,03	109 ¹²⁵	125	137
Allowance for monthly expenses for a young person with disability since childhood	122,69	163 ¹²⁶	188	206

¹²³ 40 % of the income median

¹²⁴ 60 % of the income median

¹²⁵ 20 % of the income median

¹²⁶ 30 % of the income median