European Commission

The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Synergies between gender equality and climate action

The Netherlands, 21-22 February 2024

Comments paper – Estonia

ösb Consulting
Ein Unternehmen der ÖSB Gruppe.

Justice

This publication is supported by the European Union Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (2021-2027).

This programme is implemented by the European Commission and shall contribute to the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty, the Charter and international human rights conventions, are promoted and protected.

For more information see: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/cerv

Adapting to climate change does not prevent being a caring society

Anu Laas

Poll OÜ

Abstract

Addressing climate change demands global cooperation and coordinated state action. Recognition of the gender dimension and intersectional approach is needed (Feenstra, 2024; Kajfež Bogataj, 2024). This strong message is essential to remind politicians and implementers during a period when Estonia must make significant economic and socio-political decisions.

1. Run, Estonia, run!

1.1 Gender equality and climate policies

Gender equality promotion and gender mainstreaming are coordinated by the Equality Policies Department at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication. There is also the Equality Competence Centre of the European Union Cohesion Policy Funds which is a consulting and training unit to support consideration of equality principles in the development and implementation of measures. The strategic goals of gender equality policy, indicators as well as the planned activities, are included in the Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030 and in the gender equality programme annually renewed for its implementation. The long-term strategy 'Estonia 2035' is a cross-sectoral strategic management tool and has an impact on all policy areas, where is promised to promote equal opportunities, implement measures. Table 1 further below shows that the gender pay gap has increased in 2022.

From July 2023, the Ministry of Climate is responsible for implementation of green reform, planning climate policy and plans, and the Ministry has a long list of area of activities.[1] Implementation of the green reforms is based on the 'Estonia 2035'. Estonia does not have updated energy sector plans and no consensus about the content of the Climate Act. There is clear execution gap between goals and the actions taken. In several sectoral development plans targets are set, but the implementation of the goals is slow, and several directions of action are also undecided. Indicators of the

[1] Article 61(1) of the Government of the Republic Act, RT I, 30.06.2023, 11, https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/505092023001/consolide.

Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate action show that Estonia has made some progress in this field in 2017-2021 (Statistics Estonia).

Table 1. Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5), Estonia, 2019-2022

	2019	2020	2021	2022
5.1. Gender pay gap, %	17.1	15.6	14.9	17.7
5.2. Share of women in managerial positions, %	37.1	37.4	41.1	40.2
5.3. Gender Equality Index, points	59.8	60.7	61.6	61.0

Source: Statistics Estonia, stat.ee.

1.2 Shortage of skilled labour force

Estonia's most significant constraints on economic development are a shortage of skilled labour and low labour productivity. The knowledge, skills, and experience of employees are not keeping pace with the needs of employers. Skills and labour shortages persist, particularly in healthcare and education.[2] The Estonian recovery and resilience plan (NRRP) seeks to tackle the challenge of access to skills through measures aiming at facilitating access to transversal skills. The NRRP (2021) considered several gender inequalities, but resource allocation remained somewhat indifferent to gender considerations. Additionally, funding opportunities from the ESF+ are anticipated for integrating the development of green skills into the labour market, education, and training measures.

1.3 Study on the links between equality and the green transition

The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner commissioned a study on the links between equality and the green transition. The aim of the study was to enhance understanding of the intricate links between equality and the green transition while offering support to those spearheading the green reform, helping them implement equality-focused solutions. The results of the analysis advocate for stakeholders to develop a clear comprehension of the significance and goals of gender mainstreaming, consistently integrating gender equality throughout the green transition process (Biin and Napp, 2023).[3] Eleven recommendations to enhance the integration of equality in the planning and execution of the green reform in Estonia were proposed across four areas:

- Strategic approach
- Empowering stakeholders

[2] https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/ip230_en.pdf.

[3] Biin, H. and Napp, M. (2023). Võrdõiguslikkuse vajadused ja võimalused rohepöördes (Equality needs and opportunities in the green transition), Civitta; Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner; Conference on 24 October 2024.

- Promoting evidence-based and target-group centred decision-making
- Increasing knowledge and inclusion

1.4 Main concerns and debates related to climate change

1.4.1 Multiple crises and insecurity

Policy debates are heated regarding security, war Ukraine and Israel-Hamas war, increasing energy prices, inadequate energy supply, ways of energy production, 'yes' or 'no' to nuclear power plant (SMR), car taxation, home renovation. Electricity supply may not be ensured in Estonia in 2027 because production of electricity from oil shale may no longer be competitive in the open electricity market. A contextual approach is necessary to achieve the objective of expanding renewable energy capacity. Concurrent efforts should be made to develop storage capacity, enhance power grid capacity, and establish export incentives.[4] Entrepreneurs are discussing the draft proposal of the Climate Act. There is no policy debate related to climate change and its impacts on different groups.

1.4.2 Green growth vs degrowth

Gender concerns are absent from public debate, and gender impact analysis is lacking in climate policy papers in Estonia. Articles from gender perspective on climate change are scarce. Laanep (2023) gave a brief overview about discussions held at the conference 'Beyong Growth' organised in Brussels in May 2023.[5]

1.4.3 Home renovation

Energy efficiency of housing has been high in agenda for many years in Estonia. Considering that 75% of the building fund needs renovation within a 30-year perspective, it is estimated that over 50% of the Green Deal investments must be made in buildings – the most significant societal and economic challenge (Kurnitski, 2024). The demand for state grants has been higher than funding possibilities. There are 14 000 apartment buildings to be renovated in Estonia. According to the NRRP at least 2 600 dwellings in apartment buildings and at least 80 private residences should be renovated, with primary energy savings of at least 30%. The pace of renovating apartment buildings depends on the availability of renovation grants and the affirmative decisions made by the apartment owners during the general meeting of their association. There were 23 671 apartment associations registered in the end of 2020. Unfortunately, there is no data regarding the percentage of women among the leaders of these associations.[6] Some community-based Apartment Associations Unions are led by women, for example TarKÜL in Tartu. The home renovation support scheme could be more flexible, for example, considering older women living alone,

[4] National Auditor Office reports from 2023-2024

[5] Available in Estonian at: https://roheportaal.delfi.ee/artikkel/120209416/keskkonnaekspert-unustame-majanduskasvu-see-on-toonud-kaasa-aarmusliku-ebavordsuse; https://www.beyond-growth-2023.eu.

[6] The leaders of apartment associations are active advocates for waste sorting.

as well as single parents, the majority of whom are women. Currently, social services and subsistence allowances should be provided by the local government.

2. Women in STEM and green jobs

2.1 Data availability

Collection of gender-disaggregated data on the national level is possible when the state orders these data and allocates resources to Statistics Estonia. Statistical data used to be centralized under the jurisdiction of the Statistical Office, but in recent decades, data from certain domains has been transferred to a subordinate institution of the ministry responsible for the administrative area. In the case of Estonia, this means understanding the specificities of various databases, and there can be problems with access.

Article 11(2) of the Gender Equality Act (GEA) stipulates that an employer shall collect sex-disaggregated statistical data concerning employment that allow, if necessary, the relevant institutions to monitor and assess whether the principle of equal treatment is complied with in employment relationships. The procedure for the collection of data and a list of data shall be established by the Government of the Republic by a regulation. The GEA has been in force since 2004; however, the latter regulations have not been adopted.

Data availability is important, but for measuring progress, the visualization of data should also be considered. In Estonia, there is Statistics Estonia's Tree of Truth – a benchmark for important national indicators.

2.2 Women in academia in STEM

In 2022, 43.9% of Estonians between 25 and 34 held a university degree (EU average: 42%), but the urban-rural and gender gaps remain high. The share of STEM graduates in 2020, at 27.5%, was above the EU average (24.9%). This is mainly due to one of the highest shares of ICT graduates in the EU, while the share of graduates in natural sciences, statistics, and mathematics (6.1%) and in engineering, construction, manufacturing (13%) is somewhat below the EU average (6.2% and 14.8%, respectively).[7] Female scientists are active in public debates and women in STEM are made more visible in recent decade.

RDI data sources are available from websites of Statistics Estonia (Table 2), Enterprise Estonia, ARIB (The Agricultural Registers and Information Board), Estonian Research Information System, Tax and Customs Board.

The Estonian Research and Information System has data from three sources and is based on different classifications. It utilizes researchers' CV data and public university data, allowing the information to be sorted by gender, age group, and year.

[7] European Commission (2023), Country Report: Estonia. European Economy Institutional Papers.

Table 2. Number of researchers in non-profit institutional sectors by field of science and sex, 2022

	Natural sciences		Engineering and technology		Medical and health sciences		Agricultural and veterinary sciences	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
NPO total	1239	829	605	255	200	548	183	233
HES	1131	721	564	242	182	411	177	207
GOV	96	92	35	3	18	134	6	20
Private NPO	12	16	6	10	0	3	0	6

Source: Statistics Estonia. The names of fields of science the FORD classification in Frascati Manual 2015.

According to the Common European Research Classification Scheme (CERCS) Natural sciences and mathematics, biomedical sciences and technological sciences are dominated by male researchers in Estonia in 2024 (Table 3).

Table 3. Researchers' field of activity (8 January 2024, %, CERCS)

	Males	Females
Humanities	12	19
Social sciences	19	30
Natural sciences and mathematics	27	14
Biomedical sciences	16	24
Technological sciences	26	14

Source: The Estonian Research and Information System (ETIS)

2.3 ESG reports

As gender-segregated data are still scarce in Estonia, annual company reports are publicly available. ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) reports can be a valuable source for gender-sensitive and qualitative information. For example, one can get to know that the biggest energy company Eesti Energia has 24% women among their employees. Gender-disaggregated data are provided by age group, segment and position, work years, type of employment contract.

2.4 Encouraging girls to choose STEM career

There are several inspiring activities taken by different stakeholders to get more girls to choose career in STEM:

- Science broadcast Rakett69
- Only girls in tech – HK Unicorn Squad activities and agreement with TalTech

- Project on empowering teachers and students and 'ABC of Climate Change'[8]
- EdTech Estonia – Education meets technology
- Female scientists as role models

Initiatives are an important front in dismantling systemic barriers that have kept young women from pursuing STEM degrees and tech careers. In the past decade there have been many initiatives in Estonia: Tech Sisters, Digigirls, Superheroes, showcase positive female role models.[9] The sTARTUp Day festivals are popular among women.

The shortage of teachers in STEM and the leaking pipeline continue to pose challenges in Estonia, one of reasons is high gender pay gap.

2.5 Green entrepreneurship

2.5.1 Upcycling

Upcycling is a growing trend among fashion designers, helping to save resources and keep tonnes of textile waste out of the waste stream. One of the most prominent designers and an inspiration to many is Reet Aus, a fashion designer with a PhD qualification and an environmental activist. Elina Otstak has decided to tackle the waste problem with gloves and aprons, which she makes from old sweaters and denim pants. Women are active in green business.

2.5.2 Eco-friendly agriculture

Women in Estonia are active in green business and environment protection activities. Gender disaggregated data is scarce. For example, ARIB has good statistics, but there is nothing said about clients' gender, it says that they have 10 458 livestock keepers and regional distribution is given. Data can be filtered based on counties, species, etc.

2.6 Lifelong learning

Women in all age groups outperform men in lifelong learning. For example, in 2022, the percentage of women in the age group 50-64 who participated in adult education during the last 12 months was 79%, compared to men whose participation rate was 69% (Statistics Estonia). Lifelong learning programmes and the acquisition of micro-qualifications from universities were supported by the state.

[8] The project "Climate Awareness from School to Society: empowering children, youth and teachers to reduce the impacts of climate change"

[9] https://workinestonia.com/empowering-tech-events-and-initiatives-for-women-and-girls-in-estonia/.

3. Women in green decision making

There is some progress made related to women's access to top positions. In 2022, a share of women in managerial positions was 40%. However, there is not information about the share of women in green decision making. In Estonia, there is a lack of consensus on what 'green' occupations are and how to define them.

Estonia had the first female President Kersti Kaljulaid in 2016-2021, has been as finance manager of the Iru power plant owned by the Estonian Energy company.[10] Kadri Simson is the European commissioner for energy, a position she has held since December 2019, Estonia has female Prime Minister Kaja Kallas. There are four ministers out of twelve in 2024. There are two women in the top positions of the Ministry of Climate. Deputy Secretary General for Green Transition and Deputy Secretary General for Strategy and Innovation are led by women. Out of 17 members of the Climate Council five are women. The Climate Council will remain active even after the enforcement of the Climate Act to monitor the achievement of goals and provide ongoing recommendations to the government. A total of 30 women were elected to the Parliament in March 2023, which is two more compared to the previous elections. As part of the European Green Capital Tallinn 2023 initiative, women were involved from the beginning, taking on roles as leaders, team builders, planners, and implementers. BPW Estonia had a project 'Together for a Green and Sustainable World'.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The Netherlands has the Climate Act and the National Climate Agreement. Estonia has started the drafting of the Climate Act. As the Climate Act is a social agreement, it is particularly important that all stakeholders are involved in the process of drawing up the Climate Act, so that the result is inclusive of all members of society, where a balance point is found between various influential areas, ensuring that the economic, environmental, and socio-economic impact are balanced.

The Action Plan for Green and Digital Jobs from the Netherlands is an encouraging initiative. This is impressive to learn about successful cooperation of five ministries.

Feenstra (2024) expresses concern about the low representation of women in management positions in the green transition sector in the Netherlands. It appears that Estonia should be even more concerned due to the lack of data regarding gender segregation in green jobs. Despite improved position of women in decision making in Estonia, women still face obstacles in top management due to several barriers. The patriarchal culture as an obstacle in Slovenia was highlighted by Kajfež Bogataj (2024). This continues to hinder women from utilizing all their knowledge and talent. In Estonia, issues related to resources are discussed in meetings and policy debates,

[10] https://kerstikaljulaid.ee/en/about/.

but unfortunately, human capital is not recognized as our wealth. Investing in women means investing in the community.

Kajfež Bogataj (2024) acknowledges that women in Slovenia are active, often in unpaid roles in NGOs, addressing climate change and promoting gender equality. The situation is similar in Estonia, where, if funding opportunities are limited, women try to find a way. However, this should not be the case, and women should be compensated. An important source for fair funding is gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP). Gender responsive public procurement (GRPP) promotes gender equality through the goods, services or works being purchased. In Estonia, in 2022 and 2023, amendments to the Public Procurement Act (PPA) were adopted, making the use of environmentally friendly criteria mandatory in public procurements. GRPP gives opportunities for women for successful bid.

What data to be collected? Some indicators are agreed as SDGs, Statistics Estonia provides data on SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 13 (climate). There are statistical and administrative data. ESGs can be valuable source for gender-sensitive and qualitative information. The importance of qualitative data should be considered.

In Estonia, special attention should be paid to gender sensitive data regarding access to resources, vulnerabilities and resilience and energy access. Understanding the complexities of transitions and addressing them with a comprehensive awareness of their social aspects is crucial to guarantee that no individual is overlooked or disadvantaged.

Literature

Feenstra, M. (2024), The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality: Exploring synergies between gender equality and climate action in the Netherlands. Discussion Paper - The Netherlands. Synergies between gender equality and climate action. Hague, 21-22 February 2024.

Kajfež Bogataj, L. (2024), The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality: Women Must Step Out of the Climate Change Shadow. Discussion Paper - Slovenia. Synergies between gender equality and climate action. Hague, 21-22 February 2024.