



Economic and Social Council

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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Information received from Estonia on follow-up to the concluding observations on its third periodic report*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



1. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted its concluding observations on the third periodic report of Estonia at its 30th meeting, held on 8 March 2019. In paragraph 59 of the concluding observations the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requested the State party to provide, within 24 months of the adoption of the concluding observations, information on the implementation of the recommendations contained in paragraphs 11 (amendments to the Equal Treatment Act); 15 (a) and (b) (removal of barriers to acquisition of Estonian citizenship by stateless persons) and 45 (d) (development of a gender-sensitive drug policy).
2. Hereby Estonia provides additional information on the implementation of the recommendations as requested by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 11 of the concluding observations (E/C.12/EST/CO/3)

Amendments to the Equal Treatment Act

3. The Ministry of Social Affairs is preparing the amendments to the Equal Treatment Act (ETA) to improve protection against discrimination. The current law divides the areas protected against discrimination on the ground of discrimination. It covers discrimination based on religion or belief, age, disability or sexual orientation only in the area of employment, while discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin or colour is additionally covered in the areas of education, services and social security. The planned amendments will also extend protection against discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, age, disability or sexual orientation to education, access to goods and services and social protection. The draft should be in the government February 2022. The plan also foresees additional funding to the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner.
4. Due to adoption of the directive 2014/54/EU on 16 April 2014 by the European Parliament and the Council on measures facilitating the exercise of rights conferred on workers in the context of freedom of movement for workers to ensure the better application at national level of EU citizens' right to work in another Member State, amendments were made to the ETA. "EU citizenship" as a protected ground of discrimination was included in the ETA which also allows the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner to act as a national body to provide support and legal assistance to EU migrant workers with the enforcement of their rights. Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner shall cooperate with other persons and entities to promote gender equality and equal treatment, including acting as a contact point for cooperation between the Member States of the European Union to facilitate the exercise of the right of free movement of the workers who are citizens of a Member State of the European Union and of the European Economic Area, and of their family members.
5. The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner counsels and helps people who suspect they have been discriminated against because of their gender, nationality (ethnic origin), race or colour, religion or views, age, disability or sexual orientation, social status or because they have family obligations, they represent the interests of employees or they belong to a trade union, or because of their language proficiency or national defence obligation. The Commissioner also has jurisdiction over issues of equal treatment of employees working part time or under a fixed-term employment contract and temporary agency workers.
6. The Commissioner monitors compliance with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act and the Equal Treatment Act. The Commissioner is an advisory body to the Estonian Government, government authorities and local authorities in issues pertaining to the application of the Gender Equality Act and the Equal Treatment Act and, where necessary, proposes amendments and additions to legislation. The Commissioner promotes gender equality and equal treatment. The Commissioner also acts as the point of contact for European Union Member States for the purpose of supporting the exercise of the right to free movement of workers of nationals of the European Union Member States and the EEA Countries and their family members.

7. State budget allocations for the activities of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner have consistently increased, e.g. from EUR 167,116 in 2015 to EUR 506,956 in 2020.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 15 (a) and (b) of the concluding observations

Removal of barriers to acquisition of Estonian citizenship by stateless persons

8. Estonia has consistently taken legal and policy measures to reduce the number of persons with undetermined citizenship and promote Estonian citizenship. This issue has been a focus of national integration plans through the years.

9. The procedure for applying for citizenship have been simplified in the interests of vulnerable groups such as minors, older persons and disabled persons.

10. From 2016, children of parents with undetermined citizenship automatically acquire Estonian citizenship. Consequently, there will be no additional children with undetermined citizenship since all children born in Estonia and children who move to Estonia with their parents right after birth who would have undetermined citizenship because of their parents, automatically become citizens of Estonia by naturalisation as of the moment of birth.

11. The Police and Border Guard Board takes steps to raise the awareness of persons with undetermined citizenship. When an official is in contact with such a person, the official will provide information about the possibility to apply for Estonian citizenship for themselves and their children and the benefits of Estonian citizenship.

12. The amendments to the Citizenship Act in force since 1 January 2019 enable free-of-charge language studies on the basis of a language training agreement for persons who want to apply for Estonian citizenship. The state offers free-of-charge Estonian language courses to achieve the level B1 required for citizenship for people who have resided in Estonia for at least 5 years and who meet the other requirements for citizenship. To promote language training while working, upon agreement with their employers, students can benefit from 20 days off per year, for which the state compensates their income. This agreement is deemed to be completed once the person has passed the required Estonian language courses, has passed the proficiency examination and has filed an application for Estonian citizenship.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 45(d) of the concluding observations

Development of a gender-sensitive drug policy

13. The strategic aims and activities for drug prevention in Estonia are stated in National Health Plan and white paper on drug policy, both steered by the high-level governing bodies. In 2020, the renewed National health Plan 2020–2030 was adopted, aiming, amongst other goals, to improve the quality and accessibility of services for people who use alcohol and drugs. The Government commission for drug prevention steering the implementation of white paper and regularly updating action plan for it, is expected to elaborate on additional implementation measures to improve services, addressing the specific needs of vulnerable groups. The treatment and rehabilitation services as well as harm reduction and social reintegration services in Estonia already have gender-sensitive elements, e.g. different in-patient treatment services for men and women, women led support groups for women, no barrier to access OST for pregnant women etc. Further improvement can be achieved by the increase of volume and variety of services, taking the needs of vulnerable groups into account.