



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

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

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Follow-up information on the concluding observations (CEDAW/C/EST/CO/7)

1. Estonia submits the present follow-up information in response to paragraph 49 of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in which the Committee requested the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 12 (b), 22 (a), 26 (b) and 32 (b).

A. Information relating to paragraph 12 (b)

2. The budget of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner slightly increased from 2022 to 2025. When in 2022 the budget was 505 883 EUR, then in 2025 the budget was 552 038 EUR. In 2026, due to overall budget cuts in the public sector, the bases of the Commissioners' budget decreased to 501 195 EUR. Due to additional tasks from the second half of the year in connection with transposition of the EU directives on standards for equality bodies, the Commissioner has received some extra funds for 2026 and is expected to receive some additional funding for 2027+.

3. In addition, a draft act amending the Equal Treatment Act is currently under legislative proceedings. The draft aims to strengthen the mandate of the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, including by enhancing its role and powers in line with the EU equality body standards. Additional resources are also planned in connection with the new and strengthened tasks foreseen under the draft act.

B. Information relating to paragraph 22 (a)

4. A major legislative development concerns the reform of the Penal Code to move from a force- and coercion-based approach to a consent-based understanding of sexual violence. In September 2025, the Government approved a draft amendment to the Penal Code introducing a consent-based definition of rape. The draft provides that sexual intercourse with a person without that person's free and expressed consent constitutes rape.

5. The draft law is intended to bring Estonian criminal law into line with the Istanbul Convention by ensuring that the central legal standard is the absence of free consent, rather than the use of force or the victim's inability to resist. The Riigikogu passed the first reading of the bill on 2 December 2025, and the Legal Affairs Committee continued its detailed consideration in May 2026, including further clarifications to the concept of acts of a sexual nature. The second and third reading is planned to take place at the beginning of June.

6. The preparation of the draft law has been accompanied by extensive stakeholder involvement. Before the draft was submitted to the Government, the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs carried out a broader preparatory process, including a 2024 legal analysis on the conformity of the Penal Code with the Istanbul Convention, stakeholder discussions in March 2024, dedicated consultation meetings in June and October 2024, public discussions at opinion festivals, and a concept paper submitted for comments in December 2024. The explanatory memorandum states that the question whether Estonia should introduce a "yes means yes" or "no means no" model was deliberately left to be clarified through broad-based consultation. The consultation involved state institutions, law-enforcement bodies, courts, prosecutors,

victim support services, universities, equality institutions, medical and psychological experts, local government representatives and civil society organisations working on women's rights, victim support, sexual health, child protection and human rights.

7. The draft law was subsequently submitted for formal inter-ministerial coordination and for opinions to a wide range of institutions and organisations, including courts, the Prosecutor's Office, the Chancellor of Justice, the Estonian Bar Association, the Police and Border Guard Board, the Social Insurance Board, the National Institute for Health Development, the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, universities, professional associations, women's organisations, victim support organisations and human rights organisations. In March 2026, the Legal Affairs Committee and the Social Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu also held a joint public sitting to hear the views of stakeholders on the draft.

8. The preparation of the draft has also taken into account the experience of other European countries. The concept paper preceding the draft described developments in European countries following the adoption of the Istanbul Convention and compared possible models of consent-based regulation, using examples from other jurisdictions. This comparative approach has been important because the experience of other countries shows that a consent-based reform is not merely a technical amendment to criminal law. It requires time for consultation, public debate, awareness-raising and institutional preparation, so that the new standard is understood by the public and can be effectively applied by police, prosecutors, courts, victim support services, health professionals and other relevant institutions.

9. The draft law currently provides that the amendments will enter into force on 1 July 2027. This planned timeline is intended to ensure that the reform is implemented in a meaningful way. The period before entry into force allows time to inform the public, update institutional guidance and working practices, prepare practitioners and ensure that the reform contributes to an actual change in the understanding and handling of sexual violence, rather than remaining only a formal change in the Penal Code.

C. Information relating to paragraph 26 (b)

10. No legislative amendments introducing financial incentives, tax exemptions or other statutory incentives for political parties to nominate equal numbers of women and men have been adopted during the reporting period. This aspect of the Committee's recommendation therefore remains under consideration.

11. However, the issue of women's representation in political decision-making has remained on the public and institutional agenda. In its 2024 annual overview, the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner recommended that political parties and their leaders use so-called "zebra lists", meaning gender-alternating candidate lists, in the 2025 local government council elections in order to support fairer representation of women.

12. Estonia is implementing a range of activities during the period 2023–2029 to combat gender stereotypes and reduce gender segregation in education and the labour market, including promoting gender balance at all levels of society, including in politics.

13. Since 2025, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications has been implementing an 18-month awareness-raising campaign to reduce gender segregation in decision-making and leadership, with one of its focal areas being women in politics. The campaign, titled Breaking Gender Stereotypes to Promote Gender Equality in Leadership and Decision-Making aims to raise awareness of gender

stereotypes that hinder women's leadership, promote gender balance in decision-making and politics, highlight the societal benefits of gender equality, increase institutional support for women in leadership, encourage businesses and political organisations to value gender balance, foster stereotype-free media representation of women leaders, empower young women to pursue leadership roles, and engage men, particularly young men, as allies in advancing gender equality.

14. Key target groups of the campaign include young people, for whom activities such as job shadowing days (Girls Take Over initiative) and school-based hackathons addressing gender stereotypes and segregation have been organised. The campaign also includes media briefings and seminars for journalists, as well as cooperation with social media influencers to increase the visibility of the issue, alongside other related activities. During the 2025 local government elections, the campaign paid particular attention to gender balance in electoral lists, highlighting the role and responsibility of political parties in promoting women's participation in politics.

15. In 2026, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications launched an open call for proposals with the objective of reducing gender stereotypes and gender segregation. Among the supported areas of activity is the promotion of gender balance in decision-making and leadership, including in politics. The call provides funding for projects with a duration of up to two years. Under the funding conditions, it is possible to apply for funding for activities aimed at improving gender balance in politics, including by political parties. Political parties are eligible to apply for funding for activities aimed at increasing the representation of women. The results of the call will be announced in June 2026.

16. Estonia can therefore report continued awareness-raising and institutional advocacy on this issue.

D. Information relating to paragraph 32 (b)

17. Estonia has a well-developed and highly accessible early childhood education and care system. Childcare is affordable by international standards: according to OECD comparative data, Estonia is among the countries where net childcare costs for parents are low, reflecting relatively low gross childcare fees and the effect of public support. Importantly, Estonia's system is designed so that there is no structural gap between the period covered by fully paid parental benefit and the local government's obligation to provide a childcare or preschool place.

18. Estonia has also taken further steps to improve the coherence, quality and accessibility of early childhood education and care. In December 2024, the Riigikogu adopted the new Early Childhood Education Act, which entered into force on 1 September 2025. The reform integrates childcare and preschool education into a more coherent early childhood education and care system. This is particularly relevant for women's labour-market participation, as reliable and affordable childcare directly supports parents' return to work after child-rearing periods.

19. The reform also brings childcare services more clearly into the education system, harmonises quality and qualification requirements and distinguishes ordinary educational childcare from childcare provided as a social service for children with high care and support needs. These changes are intended to ensure more consistent quality and availability of services across regions and to provide clearer support to children and families.

The Act also sets clear procedural deadlines. Local authorities must process the parent's application and decide on the child's admission to childcare or preschool no later than two months before the requested starting date. If the application is

submitted less than two months before the requested starting date, the decision must be made within two months from the submission of the application. This provides parents with greater legal certainty when planning their return to work.

20. Estonia's parental leave and benefit system further supports parents' return to the labour market and enables families to share care responsibilities more flexibly. The system consists of three main paid entitlements:

- First, maternity leave and maternity benefit are reserved for the mother: a working mother is entitled to up to 100 calendar days of maternity leave and maternity benefit, of which up to 70 days may be used before the expected date of birth. A non-working mother is entitled to 30 days of maternity benefit from the birth of the child;
- Second, fathers are entitled to 30 calendar days of paid paternity leave, which may be used from 30 days before the expected date of birth until the child turns three;
- Third, after the mother's maternity benefit period, parents are entitled to shared parental benefit, and may decide themselves which parent uses it. Shared parental benefit can be used flexibly, including in separate periods, until the child reaches the age of three.

21. Estonia has also made the system more flexible in relation to work: while work is not permitted during maternity benefit or paternity benefit, parents may work and earn income while receiving shared parental benefit. From 1 January 2026, income earned during periods of shared parental benefit no longer reduces the amount of the benefit, allowing parents to combine gradual labour-market return with the continued use of parental benefit.

22. To mitigate the impact of child-rearing periods on future pension rights, Estonia also provides additional pension-related contributions for one parent at a time in respect of children under the age of three. Parents are also able to share the pension benefit.

23. In addition to childcare, parental leave and pension-related measures, parents returning to the labour market have access to the full range of services provided by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. These include individual counselling, career guidance, skills assessment, labour-market training, support for participation in formal education, job-search assistance and other active labour-market measures aimed at supporting entry into employment or return to work. These services are available to parents on the same basis as to other persons seeking employment, while allowing the support provided to take account of the person's individual circumstances and barriers to employment.

24. Specific support is also available for young people, including young mothers, who are not in employment, education or training. Through the Youth Guarantee Support System, local authorities can proactively identify and support young people who are outside education and the labour market. The system combines an information-system tool with case management and enables local authorities to offer individual support based on the young person's needs, including support in returning to education, entering employment or accessing other appropriate services.

25. Estonia is also further developing the unemployment registration and active labour-market participation framework to better take account of care responsibilities. A draft amendment to the Labour Market Measures Act is currently under legislative proceedings. Under the planned amendments, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund would be required to take a person's care burden into account when assessing suitable work and the fulfilment of activity requirements. The draft recognises that

care responsibilities may significantly affect a person's actual possibilities to work, including the need for flexible working time, part-time work, work close to home or childcare, or work that can be combined with regular care duties. This is relevant from a gender-equality perspective, as unpaid care responsibilities continue to affect women's labour-market participation more strongly.

26. Together, these measures mean that Estonia combines affordable childcare, a statutory right to a childcare or preschool place, and a flexible parental benefit system. This supports women's reintegration into the labour market after child-rearing periods and helps reduce the long-term impact of unpaid care work on women's career development, salaries and pension rights.
