Study on the Role of Men in Gender Equality

Contract ref. no. VC/2010/0592
Country Report
Country: Estonia

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Introduction
The gender equality principle in Estonian society is not new as it was one of the leading principles of Soviet Union. However, as Karu and Pall (2009) point out the gender equality was to be achieved mainly by involving women on equal bases to labour market and the change in the masculine world was not foreseen. Instead, the state had to step in order to ease the family burden of women, so they could equally with men participate in the labour market and public sphere. The men did not have a role in achieving the gender equality. Moreover, the gender equality was more of a declared aim than an everyday reality as the women still had the double burden to bear. Karu and Pall (2009) emphasise that the means of achieving the gender equality were drastically different from the democratic societies. Coercion, fear and punishment were used as tools to achieve desired behaviour, for instance full employment. Due to this negative experience of the past regarding the gender equality and feminism have negative connotation due to socialist gender rhetoric in Estonia (Marling 2010, Kurvinen 2008).

The gender equality in its newer form has been gaining prevalence only recently. The department of gender equality at the Ministry of Social Affairs was created in 1996 and the Gender Equality Act was introduced in 2004 and a Gender Equality Ombudsman institution was created in 2005. Therefore the equality policies have quite short history and there are still many obstacles in achieving the gender equality. The policy making generally remains gender blind and gender mainstreaming is not a principle that would be used. Gender equality and feminism are still largely perceived as tools and principles which work mainly in favour of woman.

There is a gender equality monitoring carried out since 2005. The first monitoring was mainly concentrating on the women and discovering the attitudes and perceptions regarding women’s position in the society and the stereotypes regarding the women. The monitoring of 2010 introduced few questions regarding men and expectations that the society has towards men were introduced into the questionnaire. For instance, in 2010 survey people were asked if they agree that also men win from the equality between men and women. Majority of respondents agreed (67%), 19% did not agree, 14% of the population had no opinion. It is significant, though, that younger men (20-29) were more optimistic, 73% of them thought that men also benefit from gender equality (Vainu et al 2010).

The issues regarding the position of men and their role in gender equality are slowly appearing in public discussions. The male contribution to care responsibilities and the obstacles that fathers face when taking up parental leave have been studied and discussed in media, the poor health and low life expectancy of men are also worrying facts that have been acknowledged. Some activities by non profit sectors have been launched to deal with men and their rights regarding their children and also to help to violent men.

It may be concluded that very first steps towards acknowledging the role of men in achieving gender equality and in acknowledging male specific issues have been taken. Following will give an overview of the main issues regarding men and their role in gender equality in Estonia – the current situation, background, policy measures and public discourses are discussed.
2.1. Involvement of men in domestic and care work

2.1.1. Household chores and the contribution of men

In Estonia, the women are still responsible for majority of the household chores and they, on average, spend remarkably longer time on domestic work. The Time Use survey shows that in ten years, total time used for family and household has somewhat decreased for both men and women, but women are still the ones mainly responsible for the family and household chores. In 1999/2000, men and women together spent 448 minutes on family and household chores, men used 36% of this time (Statistics Estonia). In 2010, total family time spent was on average 403 minutes and 38.5% of this time was spent by men. In total men do share slightly larger part of the household chores, but this is mainly due to the fact that women do less of household jobs. Men, on average, have not increased their time, but rather decreased.

According to the time use survey in 2009/2010, men on average carry the largest share of total time spent construction and repairs (90.5% of time is spent by men), nearly equally are divided household upkeep (45%), shopping and services (44.7%), travel related to household and family care (46%), gardening and pet care (42.5%) and household management (40%). Men contribute very little in food management (23.5% of time), childcare (26.8%) and also making and care for textiles (5%). There is a large variation depending on the age of the person. The older the persons are, the more time they spend on family and household chores, the largest gender difference is in the age group 25-44 where women spend 150 minutes longer than men in 2010 (see also Graph 2 in Annex).

The Gender Monitoring 2009 asked who is mainly responsible for different household chores and the results confirm the gendered division of household chores. The only activities that were largely the main responsibility of men were repair works (79%) and car maintenance (65%). According to the Gender Monitoring (Vainu et al 2010), 5% of men and 18% of women felt often that they have too much share of household chores to carry.

The unequal division of work at home is partially due to a belief that women are more skilled in household jobs than men are. According to gender monitoring (Vainu et al 2010) in 2010 although 52% of men and 44% of women agree completely that men are capable of doing household jobs as well as women, 20% of men and women do not agree. Also, 36% of men and 29% of women think that it is women who should be responsible for household chores. Majority of households seem to accept this kind of arrangements as only very few men and women say they have often disagreements regarding the division of housework (3% of men and 7% of women). 54% of men and 46% of women say they sometimes have disagreements.

As expected, families with small children spend more time on family and care and the issue of division of these tasks is most acute when children are young. Time use survey shows that families with children under 3 years old spend 579 minutes on average on family and care. Men in these families do spend over 25 minutes longer won family and household chores than men in other families, but as a share of total workload it is less (32.2% while in families with children aged 4-6 it is 34% and in families with 7-17 year old children 40%)(see also
Graph 3 in Annex). This is partially due to the long parental leave which is mainly taken by women who are additionally automatically also are seen as responsible for households shores too.

The gender division in housework shores starts already from the upbringing – people believe that boys and girls should be taught different skills. Girls need to learn how to cook, take care of their appearance and clean. Boys need to know how to handle technical equipment, drive a car and be enterprising (Vainu et al 2010).

2.1.2. Care involvement of men for dependent persons

Estonian society displays a dual earner/female and state carer model where the labour market participation of women is high and widely accepted, but where the child care is carried by the women for the first years of the children’s lives and is afterwards mainly taken over by the public childcare facilities (Karu 2011). According to Statistics Estonia, in 2010, 86% of 3-years-olds and 90% of four and five year olds attended kindergartens while 21% of one year olds and 69.5% of two year olds did.

The state policies have emphasised the supremacy of women in childcare. Karu and Pall (2009) note that the Soviet society did aim at gender equality in the labour market as the modern Western societies do, but it was not extended to family sphere and men had no role in family or in achieving the gender equality. Men gained right for parental leave as late as 1991, but even later policy developments have been restricting father’s rights – the parental benefit that was developed in 2004 was at first limited to mothers only until child’s 6th month birthday. Rights of mothers and fathers to take parental leave and receive parental benefit have equalized by 2007. Therefore, the policy context has until very recently restricted directly father’s access to childcare. As Hobson and Morgan (2002) mark, the state has a significant role in shaping the fathering and father identities through laws and policies.

Although public opinion surveys seem to support men’s participation in childcare¹ (Vainu et al 2009), the share of parental leave taken by fathers remains very low. According to Labour Force Survey 2010, 4.3 thousands (5.4%) fathers of children younger than 8 years took parental leave after their youngest child was born (87.4 thousands or 90.1% of mothers) (Statistics Estonia). There is, however, some evidence, that some of the fathers change their working hours and limit their working responsibilities in other ways in order to care and spend more time with the family (Karu et al 2007).

A qualitative study of fathers showed that men feel they are irreplaceable at the workplace, but not at home (Karu et al 2007). Another study states that the proof of good fatherhood is seen in prioritizing work (Pajumets 2007). The statistics shows that the employment rate of fathers of children under 6 years is higher than non-fathers, but there are no longitudinal studies that would confirm changes in the labour market behaviour after becoming a father.

Care for elderly is also a significant issue from the perspective of gender equality as the care services in Estonia are not very well developed and much of the care is provided by the family (Karu 2010). Estonian Health Interview Survey 2006 shows that 9.2% of men and 12% of women say they have at least one household member who needs constant assistance

¹ 78% of men and 89% of women agree that men should participate more in childcare and raising children (Vainu et al 2010)
Unfortunately there is not much information on the gender division of the elderly care, but it may be assumed it is mainly carried by the women.

2.1.3. Care conflicts and regulations related to married, unmarried and divorced parents

Estonia is a country where there is a high risk of care conflicts. One of the reasons is the fact that cohabitation is very widely spread and also the share of children born outside of marriage is one of the largest in Europe. Although the differences between cohabiting couples and married couples are disappearing (Kasearu 2010), the legal regulations are still marriage centred. Also, the share of single mother households in Estonia is the highest in Europe as shows Eurostat comparative data (7% of all households). Also the share of single fathers is among the highest together with Luxembourg and Lithuania (0.9% of all households in 2009). People feel very tolerant towards the divorce: 76% of women and 66% of men agree that it is right to divorce a miserable marriage even if there are children involved (Kasearu 2009).

Overall both parents have equal rights and obligations regarding their children. In case of a divorce, parents either agree regarding the child custody by themselves or with a decision of the court. Is common that in case of divorce there is a “clear cut” and there is no communication between the parties (Hansson 2007). There was a study carried out in 2003 what showed that 41% of divorced mothers said that their children do not meet their fathers at all, 25% said they meet 1-2 times a year and only 19% meet once or twice per week (Hansson 2007). A study showed that in Estonia 36% of people think that in case of divorce it is better for children that they stay with their mother rather than mother. 22% do not agree this statement. This belief is more common among women than men. (Kasearu 2009)

One of the main issues that have been discussed in public and also approached by the policy regarding separated fathers concern the alimonies. Namely, in case one of the parents fails or refuses paying the alimony the state steps in and pays it to the parent who raising the child and later demands the respective amount from the separated parent, usually the father. There information on the issue of alimonies or the situation these families and children is very scarce. There are some indications that the general attitude and court decisions are in favour of mothers rather than fathers, latter being put often to a very difficult position, both financially but also emotionally. In 2006, Estonian for Fathers Association was founded “to fight against ongoing discrimination towards fathers who are living separately from their children”. The association points out that the main emphasis of the state policies have been towards fathers who are evading paying their alimonies. At the same time there has been no support for fathers who are illegitimately kept separated from their children. Also, the discussions in the forum on the website of this Association indicate that the alimonies assigned to fathers by the courts are not always realistic and fair in relation with the incomes of the father and may harm the wellbeing of other children that are in his custody. Also, the fathers have brought up the problem of mothers restricting their access to their children.

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2. See more: [http://www.isad.ee/?lang=en](http://www.isad.ee/?lang=en)
2.2. Labour: men at work

2.2.1. Segregation by gender

Estonian labour market is one of the most segregated labour markets in Europe. There are only very few occupations that are not segregated and have nearly equal share of female and male employees (manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade; real estate, public administration and defence). There are no signs of feminized sectors becoming less feminized over time or male dominated sectors becoming less male dominate. A recent study on gender pay gap provided insights into some cases where the economic boom created some preconditions for reducing of the gender segregation – employers were forced to employ women to traditionally male positions due to lack of male employees. They, however, were met with resistance from male employees (Kallaste et al. 2010) and the persistence and impact of these cases is not clear.

Leetmaa (2008) who analyzed the doctors of whom 71% are female and showed that the picture is more complex when looked according to more precise professions. The share of women in surgical professions is lower, 59% higher among therapeutic professions (80%). There are some professions which are mainly dominated by men like neurosurgeons (15% are female), general surgeons (25%), orthopaedists (38%). None of the therapeutic professions (general practitioners, paediatricians etc) are dominated by men. The wages are generally higher in surgery than in therapeutic professions.

Half of men still tend to think that men are better leaders/managers than women (Vainu et al 2010). Women support male supremacy in managerial positions less, but also a considerable share of them also prefers and appreciates male managers more (Vöörmann 2006). The vertical segregation seems to have deepened slightly in some aspects in past 20 years. The share of legislators, senior officials and managers among male employees has increased somewhat (from 13.5% 1990 to 15.1% in 2010), making up now 63% if the occupational group, while among women the share has decreased (from 9.2% to 8.2%) (Statistics Estonia).

The segregation in the labour market does start already from the choice of academic programmes. First of all, the share of men among higher education has decreased over time and the university education has feminized. Secondly, the subjects that men study differ from those than women. Men very seldom study in the field of education (8% of students in 2009/2010) and health and wellbeing (12%) (Klooster and Tõnisson 2010). Also within the vocational education men and women concentrate on completely different occupations. Men are mainly in natural sciences, engineering, manufacturing and construction. The educational paths of men and women have been different already for decades as shows the study analysing educational choices made in 1980s where the educational paths were determined largely by the gender. (Vöörmann 2005)

A study carried out in 2002 showed that 72% of men think their current job is only suitable for men and 43% of women that their job is suitable only for female. Only 2% of females admit their job is ‘men’s job’ and 1% of men admit their job is a ‘female job’ (Pettai, Proos 2003). People think that women suite better to work in kindergartens and flower shops, to work as a cleaner or family doctor. Men are more suitable, for instance to work as taxi drivers, basketball coaches or surgeon (Vöörmann 2006). These attitudes are reflected also in the actions of employers. A study by Emor (2007) showed that very few organizations have taken any
actions to reduce segregation (Emor, 2007). Segregation in the labour market is one of the explanatory factors behind Estonian very large gender pay gap (Anspal et al. 2010). There has been some awareness rising campaigns encouraging young people to choose atypical occupations. A media campaign was launched to promote equal opportunities for men and women on the labour market including several activities (advertisements, website, games etc). A short-film competition was held and information seminars on equal opportunities were conducted in schools.

2.2.2. Labour forms by gender

There is very little attention to different labour forms and their impact on men and gender equality in Estonia. Men in general work less part-time and less in shifts (Statistics Estonia) The average working time of both men and women has decreased during past 10 years, but still more men have very long working weeks than women (7.4% of men and 1.9% of women worked more than 49 hours per week in 2008) (Masso 2010). Masso (2010), using European Working conditions data shows that in 2005 the speed of work done by men is faster. Men work less than men during evenings, nights and weekends and they also have bigger chances of deciding their own working hours. This may have implications for family and work reconciliation – having more power over ones working conditions and working hours men have good preconditions for better work and family reconciliation.

2.2.5. Educational achievements

Women in Estonia are in general higher educated and they continue their studies on average longer than men do (see also graph 4 and 5 in the Annex). Boys are less presented in higher education and overall the educational achievement of men remains lower than that of women. Also, the question of drop outs concern more boys than girls. However, there is not much qualitative information on the reasons or implications regarding the gender differences in the education.

2.3. Overall and single topics: politics, health, violence and others

2.3.1. Political participation

The politics is mainly a male field of activity. Majority of the members of the parliament are male, currently there are 81 men and 20 women in the parliament, and 80.2% of the parliament consists of men. The previous parliament was slightly less masculine with 76.2% of men. In a period of 1992-2007 the minimum share of women in the parliament was 11.9% and the maximum 23.8% (Allik 2011b). Majority of the ministers have always also been male. There is currently one female minister and recently the number of women has varied between 1-3 females.
A study by Allik (2010) shows that gender is not a reason for a candidate to be less likely elected. Other, more objective factors play here a role like previous experience, age and place in the election lists, for instance. These, however, vary according to the gender and also the number of women running for the parliament is low (Allik 2011a).

Allik (2011b) summarizes different studies and points out that in mid 1990’s nearly 80% of men and about 60% of women in Estonia believed that “men make better political leaders” while in 2005 the respective percentages were 53 and 34, showing remarkable decrease in just 10 years. Similarly, in 2005 19% of men and 40% of women believed that there should be more women representatives in the Estonian parliament and just four years later these percentages were 32 and 49 (Vainu et al. 2010). Generally, there are no public debates regarding the overrepresentativeness of men in politics and no action is taken to change the masculine nature of political participation.

2.3.2. Health, life expectancy, particularly gendered risk factors

Health and life expectancy are two of the few issues in the discussions of gender equality that are mainly concentrating on men. The life expectancy of men in Estonia is alarmingly low and so is the gender gap that has varied in a period of 1990-2009 around 10-11pp, peaking at 13pp in 1995 (data by Statistics Estonia). In 2009, the average life expectancy of men is 69.8 and life expectancy of women is 80.7 years. There has been a slow steady increase in life expectancy of men from the lowest point of 60.5 in 1994. The first years of independence brought along a decrease in male life expectancy by 4 years.

The gender difference in life expectancy is caused by early deaths of men. In 2008, 40% of men and 17% of women died before reaching 65 years of age and 92% of men and 70% of women died before they reached 85 years (Lai 2010). The early deaths are strongly connected with the risk behaviour of men – alcohol abuse, lack of physical activities, accidents etc. Lai (2010) counts the differences in behaviour - men are more often overweight and as a worrying trend we can see the decreasing physical activity among young men (16-24); significantly more men smoke in comparison with women. There is a decreasing trend in smoking, however. In 2004, nearly 80% of men with the lowest education smoked by 2008 the share has decreased to nearly 50%. Men also drink significantly more than women, in 2008 8% of men and 1% of women said they consume alcohol every day, 36% of men and 13% of women drink alcohol few times a week.

According to Lai and the indicator of DFLE (disability free life expectancy) men who were born in 2007 have chances of living completely healthy until they get 50 and women until they get 55 years old. Combined with the gender gap in life expectancies, this means that men have fewer years to live in poor health (18 years) than women (24 years). In both cases, Lai (2010) emphasises, the healthy years end before the retirement age.

We can see that the health of women has improved more than the health of men during past 10 years and it has been concluded by Lai (2010) that the health policies have been more efficient in improving the health of women. Despite to the fact that health is one of the areas where the gender differences are most acute, the policy measures and approaches keep being gender blind – men and women are not targeted separately. As Lai (2010) emphasises, the policies that have been implemented so far have been more effective in case of women. Therefore it would be beneficial to rethink the policies and put more emphasis on improving the health of men. Lai assumes that there are differences between men and
women, for instance in media use and educational level which have lead to the fact that the awareness raising has reached women better than men. In order to lessen the differences in health, Lai (2010) concludes that it would be beneficial to use better targeting of the policy measures.

2.3.3. Violence (with men as perpetrators and victims)

Regarding the issue of violence, the men are usually perceived as perpetrators and women as victims. Studies confirm that this indeed the trend usual trend, but there are also cases of male victims and female perpetrators and these require more attention.

The studies carried out in 1990s showed that men were more often victims of violence (attacks and threats) than women. Using data of crime victims carried out in 2009 Salla and Surva point out that in the beginning of the this century, violence towards both men and women decreased significantly and in 2003 and 2008 more women than men suffered from violence. In 2008, 3.9% of women and 3.4% of men say they have suffer ed from violence or threats. In the 90s, the share of men experiencing violence or threats was over 7% and the share of women varied from 2.8% to 5.5%. Younger persons report more often having experienced violence or threats, especially younger men.

Men experience less mental violence than women\(^4\) (Soo 2010). Soo also analyses the physical violence more in depth and demonstrates that although in general men and women experience violence in a similar amount, women’s experiences are more severe and with more serious consequences. Men state most often that they have been slapped (23%), thrown with something to hurt him (12%). Sexual harassment, as expected, is more experienced by women (6.5%), but also 1.9% of men state they have been a victim of sexual harassment (Salla, Surva 2010).

The behaviour of men and women in case of violence differ. Men do not turn to shelters in case of violence. Also men seldom report that they need any kind of counselling or help and they seldom talk of the violent incidents to anyone (Soo 2010). Salla and Surva (2009), however, point out that men register the cases of violence more often than women which may be caused by the fact that men experience violence more often in the public places and women at home. Taking into account that the services and attention is mainly turned to female victims, especially in case of domestic violence, men may not receive help. Especially since men who are less prone to seek help and there is lack of special services to men.

In recent years some attention has been turned to male perpetrators. For instance, from 2006, there are also rehabilitation groups to male perpetrators to learn anger management in some local governments. Also this service is provided in some prisons. Due to lack of financing, however, the service has not provided state wide but only in some municipalities (Soo, Otstavel 2010). The measures to help and prevent domestic violence are provided often by non-profit sector.

\(^4\) 36% of men and 41% of women state in 2009 that they have experienced some mental violence during their whole life time
2.3.4. Military services

According to Defence Forces Service Act every male Estonian citizen is required to serve in the Defence Forces – to perform his duty to serve in the Defence Forces. Every male Estonian citizen between 16 and 60 years of age is liable to service in the Defence Forces unless he has been deleted from the register of persons liable to service in the Defence Forces on the bases and pursuant to the procedure provided for in this Act. The service lasts from 8 months to 11 months. The Defence Forces are also open to women and according to data from Estonian Defence Forces, in 2011 there are 1092 women working in defence forces. Majority of them (69.5%) are, however, civil servants. Children of those in the military service are paid a benefit (47.94 Euros per month).

Majority of the population find the compulsory defence service necessary, only 5% of the Estonian inhabitants (15% of young men aged 20-29) think it is not necessary (Ormisson 2010). Majority of men are prepared and willing to participate in the defence service. 4% felt aversion and 22% admitted if they had a choice they would not have participated. 12% would have not entered the defence force without compulsion and 30% would have definitely not entered (Kaitseressursside Amet 2010). Each year about 2500-3000 young men are in the compulsory service. The poor health of young people is reflected and also discussed also in relation with the military service. Over quarter of the young men are exempted from the service due to health problems.

2.3.5. Homophobia

Homophobia in Estonia can be regarded to be a quite extensive problem. Until recently there has been very little public discussion regarding the issue, but in the last few years the rights of homosexuals, especially the right to marry has become an issue of public debate.

Homosexuality is still regarded as a shameful issue and people do not discuss it. According to Eurobarometer “discrimination in the EU 2009”\(^5\), only 17% of people say they have acquaintances that are homosexual (while 38% EU average). The study also showed that people would not feel positive if a homosexual is elected to be in the highest political position. At the same time, according to Eurobarometer on Discrimination only 28% believed in 2009 that discrimination based on sexual orientation is widespread in Estonia (EU average is 47%). Also, there are nearly no reported cases of discrimination, which is not an indication of lack of discrimination, but rather a sign of lack of awareness.

A recent qualitative study showed that the tolerance towards homosexuals in Estonia is deceptive and instead of caring tolerance there is ignorance and indifference. Moreover, in a face to face situation, people display tolerance, but in a group they become hostile towards LGBT people (Strömpl et al 2007). A survey carried out showed that 1% of the population reported that they have been discriminated based on their sexual preferences (Lagerspetz et al 2007). Study by Strömpl et al (2007) pointed out that some of the homosexuals do not perceive discrimination as they think they deserve being treated differently.

The most discussed issue concerns the possible legalization of same sex marriages or partnerships. There are quite heated public debates in 2011 where different options of regulating

the same sex partnerships were discussed publicly by ministers and politicians. Also the Chancellor of Justice has investigated the issue. The parliament elections of 2011 were the first time when the political parties were asked to present their views on GLBT issue (Kampus 2011). Three out of seven larger parties said they do not support same sex marriages. In August 2011, the Minister of Justice has presented proposals to solve the issues regarding same sex marriages, including the questions regarding property and children.

There have been some activities approaching the issue of tolerance and homophobia. For instance, the Tallinn Law School at Tallinn University of Technology has set up a project “Diversity Enriches”\(^6\) in order to increase the tolerance and to stop homophobia and racism\(^7\). The main objectives of the project are better implementing the legislation on non-discrimination and fostering the dissemination of information on EU and national policy and legislation in the non-discrimination field. The project involves several activities in 2010 and 2011 (trainings, a conference, film festival, a TV show, study materials, exhibition etc). These can be regarded to be first systematic efforts to raise awareness and tackle homophobia in Estonian society.

To raise awareness there has been a yearly Gay Parade since 2004. However, each year there are discussions over prohibiting the parade. In 2008 it was cancelled due to safety reasons, also in 2005 it was seriously considered. The organizers admitted that people are not ready for this kind of actions and also politicians in 2008 were not ready to discuss the issues of homosexuals. Also in 2010 Baltic Pride was cancelled due to risk to safety – the public opinion has been hostile towards the parade and also the homosexuals in general.

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\(^6\) The website of the campaign, in English [http://www.erinevusrikastab.ee/en](http://www.erinevusrikastab.ee/en)

\(^7\) The project is financed by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013) [http://ec.europa.eu/progress](http://ec.europa.eu/progress)
Annex

Graph 1. Time used on family and household chores, by gender and activity, 2009/2010


Graph 2. Time spent on family and household chores by gender and age 2009/2010


Graph 3. Time spent on family and household chores by gender and age of the child(ren) 2009/2010
Graph 4 in net enrolment rate in formal education by sex, 2010

Source: Statistics Estonia electronic database

Graph 5. Gender gap in net enrolment rate in formal education by sex, 2010

Source: Statistics Estonia electronic database
Note: Gender gap equals enrolment rate of girls minus enrolment rate of boys
Source: Statistics Estonia electronic database
Sources


