



Advancing Gender Equality in the Saeima of Latvia

Report on the Participatory Gender Audit

February, 2026.

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1. INTRODUCTION

National parliaments are well placed to champion the objective of gender equality and promote gender mainstreaming, by responding to the needs and interests of both men and women in its composition, structures, operations, working methods, and day-to-day work. Parliaments are also responsible for producing gender-responsive policy outcomes, through decision-making and the adoption of documents within the competence of the parliaments, or indirectly through gender-sensitive oversight of the performance of the executive.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has a mandate to assist OSCE participating States in promoting women's political participation and to provide expertise and support to strengthen democratic institutions for advancing gender equality. The OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04 on the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality tasks ODIHR with the following mandate:

- "...ODIHR will assist in the development and implementation of specific programmes and activities to promote women's rights, to increase the role of women at all levels of decision-making, and to promote equality between women and men throughout the OSCE area...", and
- "ODIHR will assist participating States in developing effective measures to bring about the equal participation of women in democratic processes and will assist in developing best practices for their implementation..."

In continuation of ODIHR's efforts to promote women's political participation and to further advance the level of gender sensitivity of democratic institutions, ODIHR is supporting national parliaments in conducting participatory gender audits.

ODIHR and the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia agreed, as per letter from 26 June 2024 from the Saeima, to conduct a gender audit of the parliament of Latvia. By conducting this gender audit, the Saeima is meeting its commitment as per the 2022 Kigali Declaration of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Through the Kigali Declaration participating national parliaments commit to conducting at least two gender audits in the period of ten years (see also Appendix 3).

The gender audit was conducted by ODIHR staff and external experts, in the period November 2024 until June 2025 and resulted in this report.

2. GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS: THE CONCEPT

A parliament is gender-sensitive when it actively and in practice respects and delivers on gender equality. One of the earliest and most used definitions comes from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The IPU defines gender-sensitive parliament as follows:

A parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its composition, structures, operations, methods and work. Gender-sensitive parliaments remove the barriers to women's full participation and offer a positive example or model to society at large. They ensure that their operations and resources are used effectively towards promoting gender equality. A gender-sensitive parliament is one in which there are no barriers – substantive, structural or cultural – to women's full participation and to equality between its men and women members and staff. It is not only a place where women can work, but also one where women want to work and contribute. A gender-sensitive parliament sets a positive example by promoting gender equality and women's empowerment among society both nationally and internationally. A gender-sensitive parliament is therefore a modern parliament; one that addresses and reflects the equality demands of a modern society. Ultimately, it is a parliament that is more efficient, effective and legitimate.¹

A gender-sensitive parliament can also be defined as one, which “values and prioritizes gender equality as a social, economic, and political objective and reorients and transforms a parliament’s institutional culture, processes and practices, and outputs towards these objectives”.²

Parliaments are working organisations with rules, norms, internal procedures, and a specific gendered culture like any other working place; whether a member of parliament is a man or a woman in parliament makes a difference in terms of power and influence and this difference is exacerbated depending on other intersecting factors such as ethnic origin, minority status or identity, disability, age, class, sexual orientation and identity. Parliaments are, however, also very specific work places as they are symbols of democracy, representation and legality, and responsible for making laws, budgets and overseeing the government.

Gender-sensitive parliaments are not a simple nor static phenomenon. They have a high level of complexity and change across countries and across time. There is not a single path that leads to gender-sensitivity: one country may start from increasing the number of women members of parliament (also MPs as follows), while another may focus on creating more gender-sensitive parliamentary working practices. What is common for all is that gender-sensitive parliamentary institutions are more efficient in and able to respond to the needs of both women and men.

In gender-sensitive parliament both women and men are equally included in its work, are made aware of gender responsive internal rules and norms, and make meaningful efforts to pursue gender equality both internally and externally through gender-sensitive policies. Ultimately, concentrating on gender equality means contributing to building a fairer society where social justice is a shared value, effectively implemented.

¹ [Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments](#), Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017.

² Sarah Childs & Sonia Palmieri, “Gender Sensitive Parliaments: Feminizing Formal Political Institutions”, in Marian Sawyer, Lee Ann Banaszak, Jacqui True, and Johanna Kantola (editors), *Handbook of Feminist Governance*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2023).

National parliaments are uniquely placed to champion progress towards, and full achievement of, gender equality in politics and indeed in all spheres. This crucial role for parliaments has also been well entrenched in international conventions and commitments. The 1995 UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, for example, required governments to report “on a regular basis, to legislative bodies on the progress of efforts, as appropriate, to mainstream gender concerns” (paragraph 109).

In the ensuing decades, the concept of gender-sensitive parliaments has become the clearest expression of parliaments’ responsibility to promote and achieve gender equality. International parliamentary organisations such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the IPU have been at the forefront of these efforts, having produced an evidence base as well as political texts that encourage further action in support of gender sensitivity around the world.³ Today, a number of intergovernmental entities, including ODIHR, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as well as the United Nations, have dedicated resources to support the removal of barriers to women’s full and effective participation in parliaments.

3. PARTICIPATORY GENDER ASSESSMENT: THE APPROACH

The purpose of the participatory gender audit is to help parliaments assess the degree to which they are gender-sensitive and gender-responsive in their key functions of representation, law-making and oversight, and to formulate recommendations to improve gender sensitivity within parliament. The audit applies an intersectional approach, understanding that women and men are very diverse, based on other personal characteristics.

A parliamentary participatory gender audit (hereafter also referred to as “gender audit” or just “audit”) is an assessment, designed and undertaken by external experts, together with the parliamentary leadership, members of parliament, parliamentary staff, civil society organizations, and other relevant organisations. A participatory gender audit entails gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources to develop an objective understanding of current practices and processes.

Parliaments vary in their level of gender sensitivity and there is room for improvement across the OSCE region. Participatory gender audits are relevant to all parliaments, whatever the political system and whatever the stage of development. The participatory gender audit process is not intended to rank parliaments, but rather to help parliaments to identify their strengths and weaknesses in order to determine priorities for strengthening the institution. The audit provides a framework for discussion among members of parliament, decision-makers in the parliamentary administration and parliamentary staff. The approach involves answering questions about the policy frameworks and work of the parliament concerned.

The gender audit approach recognises that parliaments are both places for democratic representation and places of work. ODIHR’s guidance document is designed to enable systematic and comprehensive examination of the ways in which institutional gender insensitivities mediate parliamentary interactions and outputs, across its activities. The audit includes both formal rules and procedures and informal practices, parliamentarians’ and

³ [Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards and a Checklist for Parliamentary Change](#), Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 2020; [Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice](#), Inter-Parliamentary Union 2011.

parliamentary staff's experiences and preferences, individual behaviour and collective interactions, as well as the wider parliamentary culture. Just increasing the number of women in parliament is not sufficient to make parliaments more gender-sensitive. Women frequently enter highly masculinised institutions where the formal and informal rules and practices reflect the behavioural and historical preferences of men who have long inhabited parliaments. In short, the audit process moves attention from "fixing women" to "fixing institutions". Being a female member of parliament in an environment designed around and for men creates challenges and can make it difficult for women to achieve their potential in parliament and to remain as members of parliament for long periods of time. It also adds to the difficulty of encouraging women to consider a parliamentary career.

The gender audit of the Saeima of Latvia has been undertaken based on the ODIHR methodology, elaborated in the publication "Participatory Gender Audits. A step-by-step Guidance Document for OSCE Parliaments"⁴. The ODIHR methodology sets gender sensitivity within the framework of the three main functions of parliaments:

- representation,
- law-making and
- oversight

For each of the functions there is a list of standards leading the audit process (see Appendix 2). It is important to highlight, that the gender audit does not analyse the outcome of the law-making process, i.e. the content of the laws that are adopted in parliament and the degree to which they are gender-sensitive or respond to the needs of women and men.

4. METHODOLOGY

The audit has been led and implemented by ODIHR staff and an external expert. The audit involved quantitative and qualitative data collecting and analysis, including information from recent questionnaires, reports, legal documents, interviews and focus groups. A desk review was undertaken on the situation of gender equality in politics in Latvia and the efforts that have been made to increase the number of female representatives. In preparation of the gender audit, the parliament collected a set of data and responded to a pre-structured questionnaire (December 2024). Additionally, the parliament conducted a perception and attitudes survey among MPs and parliamentary staff (December 2024- February 2025). 312 MPs and staff members responded to the survey. 191 of the respondents were women. 44 of the respondents were MPs, 227 were parliamentary staff, and the rest did not provide their title (see Appendix 1). Not all respondents responded to all the question with the average response rate being 192 out of 312 and ranging from the lowest response rate of 162 to the highest of 212.

An inception visit was undertaken from 27-29 May 2025. A workshop, interviews and focus groups were undertaken with 36 (22 women and 14 men) members of parliament, members of the parliamentary service, and representatives of civil society.

A one-day workshop with 19 participants (7 members of parliament and 10 parliamentary staff, and 2 representatives of civil society; 10 women and 9 men), on 27 May 2025, was held with the following objectives:

⁴ [Participatory Gender Audits. A step-by-step Guidance Document for OSCE Parliaments](#), ODIHR, 2022.

- Introduce the concept of gender-sensitive parliaments;
- Provide an overview of the international framework on gender equality;
- Contribute through discussions to the participatory gender audit; and
- Identify potential actions for parliament to take to become more gender sensitive.

Following the post-visit drafting process, the present report has been finalised in February 2026.

5. FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Introductory findings

1. Latvia is party to the major UN and European human rights and gender equality treaties. Among others, Latvia acceded to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992 and ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) in 2024. It has been committed to the Beijing Platform for Action since 1995.
2. The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia does not specifically mention gender equality or women's rights, but there are broad provisions on human rights. Chapter VIII on Fundamental Human Rights, Art. 91 does affirm the equality of all citizens before the law and the courts and that "human rights shall be realised without discrimination of any kind." Equality is also included as one of the "foundations of a cohesive society" in the preamble. Art. 89 of the Constitution states that: "the State shall recognize and protect fundamental human rights in accordance with this Constitution, laws, and international agreements binding upon Latvia", which includes Latvia's international obligations relating to gender equality.
3. Latvia reports regularly to the CEDAW Committee. The CEDAW Committee in the latest Concluding Observations, published in 2020⁵, welcomed the progress made by Latvia in promoting women's participation in political and public life, including elected posts at the local, national and European levels, as well as the amendments made to the legislative framework on ensuring gender equality, prohibiting gender-based discrimination, and preventing gender-based violence.
4. The CEDAW Committee did express concern regarding a number of areas: the insufficient participation of women in political and public life, particularly among the most disadvantaged women; the lack of a comprehensive legal definition of gender-based discrimination and gender equality; the absence of a comprehensive gender-equality law; the absence of temporary special measures; the lack of understanding of the non-discriminatory nature of temporary special measures; the persistence of gender-based discriminatory stereotypes and patriarchal messaging by politicians as well as calls for adherence to traditional roles and values for women; and the barriers preventing Roma women and women from ethnic minorities from participating in political life.
5. As a result, the CEDAW Committee made the following recommendations, among others:
 - a. "Strengthen efforts to increase the representation of women in political life at the decision-making level in both elected and appointed governmental bodies and adopt temporary special measures, including requiring political parties to introduce quotas for women candidates" (Para. 30)
 - b. "Include a definition of discrimination against women, including intersecting forms of discrimination in both public and private spheres, and the principle of equality of women and men in the Constitution or other appropriate legislation, and adopt a comprehensive gender equality law" (Para. 12)

⁵ Concluding observations on the combined 4th to 7th periodic reports of Latvia, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 10 March 2020.

- c. “Adopt and apply temporary special measures to promote the substantive equality of women and men in all areas in which women are underrepresented and disadvantaged” (Para. 20. a)
 - d. “Raise awareness among the legislature, policymakers, the judiciary, other law enforcement officials and civil society, as well as the private sector, on the use of temporary special measures as a critical tool for addressing discrimination in all spheres and achieving the substantive equality of women and men” (Para. 20. b)
 - e. “Adopt a comprehensive strategy to combat discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, with the involvement of women’s organizations” (Para. 22. a)
 - f. “Raise awareness among media enterprises of the need to combat gender stereotypes and encourage them to portray positive images of women as active participants in political and economic life, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women” (Para. 22. b)
 - g. “Intensify efforts to ensure that Roma women and women from other ethnic minorities enjoy equal access to ... participation in public and political life” (Para. 42. b)
6. In the 2024 National Report of the Republic of Latvia on the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, it states that: “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”.⁶
 7. Latvia does not have a stand-alone, comprehensive gender equality law. Instead, Latvia has chosen to implement international standards and European Union (EU)’s gender equality standards within distinct laws regulating each field of life. Consequently, the principle of gender equality and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex have been integrated into several pieces of legislation, such as: the Labour Law, the Education Law, the State Civil Service Law, the Military Service Law, the Consumer Rights Protection Law, the Criminal Code, the Law on Social Security, and the Law on State Pensions.
 8. As noted by the CEDAW Committee in Para. 11 of the latest Concluding Observations, there is no “stand-alone legal definition of discrimination against women and the principle of equality of women and men in the legislative framework”. A report by the European Commission’s European Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination expressed concern that “problems arise because the structure of Latvian special laws does not always coincide with the material and personal scope of the EU gender equality and non-discrimination law, which leads to a situation that implementing measures do not completely cover the scope required under relevant EU directives”.⁷ In addition, it argues that these “special laws usually regulate legal relationships between private parties, while EU gender equality and non-discrimination law entails horizontal and mainstreaming obligations for state powers”.⁸ The report also noted that there is no definition of sexual harassment in Latvian legislation.⁹
 9. Latvia currently has a national strategy for gender equality: the Plan for the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-27. It is mentioned in the

⁶ National Report of the Republic of Latvia on the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia, 2024, page 42.

⁷ Country Report: Gender Equality (Latvia), European Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination, European Commission Directorate General for Justice and Consumers, 2024, page 8.

⁸ Ibid., page 9.

⁹ Ibid., page 18.

introduction that the 2024-2027 Plan was developed based on recommendations of the 2020 Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee. The strategy notes that women in Latvia are less likely to be involved in politics and lists “prejudices and stereotypes based on the role of women and men in society, the political environment, and corporate culture” as one of the reasons for the unequal representation of women and men in decision-making processes. One action result in the strategy (5.2) is to promote the more active involvement of women in decision-making processes and politics by the end of 2027.

10. The European Institute for Gender Equality’s (EIGE) 2024 Gender Equality Index scored Latvia 62.6 out of 100, which is below the EU average. In all but one of the seven indicators, Latvia is below the EU average, including the domain of power, which includes political power. In the last 10 years, Latvia’s power score has remained fairly unchanged. EIGE did note that women’s presence in national parliaments has increased. On the whole, Latvia is improving at a slower pace than other EU Member States who are also scored on the Gender Equality Index.¹⁰

¹⁰ Latvia Gender Equality Index 2024, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024.

DIMENSION 1:

GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

11. Representation is one of a parliament's key functions and "parliaments realize their representative function by reflecting the public's diverse experiences in decision-making", including through achieving gender balance in decision-making and removing barriers to women's political participation¹¹.
12. Over time, international standards on equal participation of women and men in parliaments have developed significantly. CEDAW calls on States Parties to ensure women have equal rights to vote, stand for election, and take part in formulating policy, including through the adoption of temporary special measures. In 1990, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) recommended in resolution E/RES/1990/15 a target of 30% women in leadership posts by 1995 and 50% by 2000¹². The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe defined gender balance in Recommendation 3 (2003)¹³ as "the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political and public life [that] should not fall below 40%".
13. In 2021, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) set a goal of achieving 50/50 gender balance in all elected positions.¹⁴ On 25 October 2024, the CEDAW Committee issued General Recommendation 40¹⁵, defining in Para.2 equal and inclusive representation as 50:50 parity between men and women in terms of equal access to and equal power within decision-making systems.
14. Beyond the global recognition of the importance of gender parity, there is also a growing understanding of the need that women's representation also includes women from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. CEDAW General Recommendation 40 (2024) reaffirmed that State parties must take an intersectional lens to gender equality issues and that women in all their diversity need to be "leading forces in legislation, strategies, policies, and programmes" in order to ensure truly inclusive decision-making systems.¹⁶ Additionally, Recommendation 3 of the IPU's Kigali Declaration (2022)¹⁷ calls on parliaments to "recognise the individual differences among women and prioritise the inclusion of underrepresented groups such as young women, indigenous women, and women with disabilities".
15. The Saeima of Latvia is formed of 100 MPs, who are elected using a proportional open list system with five multi-member constituencies. The number of mandates per constituency is determined by the number of registered voters within the constituency, according to Art.7

¹¹ Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region, ODIHR, 2021, page 7.

¹² Recommendations and conclusions arising from the 1st review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000, UN Economic and Social Council, 1990, page 16.

¹³ Recommendation (2003)3, "Of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making", Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 831st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, 12 March 2003.

¹⁴ Agreed conclusions: Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, UN Commission on the Status of Women, 66th Session, March 2022, page 14.

¹⁵ General recommendation No.40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 25 October 2024.

¹⁶ Ibid., page 8.

¹⁷ See excerpt in Appendix III of this report.

of the Constitution and the formula prescribed in Art. 8.2 of the Law on the Election of the Saeima. Voters may cast preferential votes, by marking “+” next to a candidate they especially support and striking out a name they do not support (Art.23.3 on the Law on the Election of the Saeima). Candidates are elected in order of preferential votes. The last parliamentary elections took place on 1 October 2022.

16. The Law on the Election of the Saeima does not mention equal representation of women and men as a goal and does not foresee any temporary special measures related to the substantive equality of women and men. Gender is only mentioned in Art.11.4.a, which outlines that a candidate’s gender will be included in the party list.
17. The ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report for the 2022 elections noted that “the lack of legal requirements for gender representation in lists of candidates together with the preferential voting system in place was raised as inconducive to increasing women’s participation in parliament”.¹⁸ An independent academic study has demonstrated the negative impact of preferential voting on women candidates.¹⁹
18. The Law on Political Parties of 2006 does not contain any specific provisions on gender equality. Art. 2.3 does state that “parties shall carry out political activities and create their internal organisation in accordance with the principle of democracy, openness, and member equality”. The Law on Financing of Political Organizations (Parties) of 1995 similarly does not mention gender, women, or gender equality.
19. There is a significant gap among political parties when it comes to the number of women candidates that they are putting forward for elections. For example, at the last elections in 2022, the ODIHR noted that women made up 36.4% of election candidates, varying from 27% to 50% on party lists, and that many party programmes touched on issues relating to women’s rights. Most of these programmes were related to maternity policies, with only one substantially addressing gender equality. The report noted that most parties met by the Election Assessment Mission “did not have specific internal mechanisms for promoting women and other-represented groups as candidates”.²⁰
20. Research as part of this gender audit confirmed that no political party in Latvia applies statutory gender quotas. Based on the questionnaire and interview data, of the seven political parties that currently have representation in the Saeima, the Progressive Party is the only party that takes active steps to ensure gender-balanced representation in party leadership, ministerial appointments, and candidate lists, without applying formal quotas. The party also has a Women’s Rights and Gender Equality Strategic Working Group. According to the survey data (see Appendix 1), there was a fairly even split between those in the parliamentary community that either agreed or disagreed with the statement that women and men should have minimum 40% representation in parliament, with 34% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing and 38% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
21. The 2022 ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report recommended that: “Political parties should adopt effective internal mechanisms for strengthening women’s participation and representation within political parties. The legislature should consider additional

¹⁸ ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report: Latvia Parliamentary Elections 1 October 2022, ODIHR, 6 April 2023, page 6.

¹⁹ Dean, Laura A. *Striking out women: preferential voting and gender bias in Latvian Saeima elections*, *East European Politics*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2021, pp. 635-658.

²⁰ ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report: Latvia Parliamentary Elections 1 October 2022, ODIHR, 6 April 2023, page 12.

measures to promote the political participation of women, such as through legal quotas on candidate lists, or financial incentives linked to public funding”.²¹

22. The Saeima has 30 women MPs in the current convocation, making up 30% of seats. This places Latvia slightly lower, in terms of the representation of women in parliament, than the latest OSCE average of 31.6%.²² The following data was collected on women’s presence in all Saeima convocations since the introduction of multi-party elections²³:

Convocation	% of women MPs
1990-1993	9
1993-1995	14
1995-1998	8
1998-2002	17
2002-2006	18
2006-2010	19
2010-2011	19
2011-2014	21
2014-2018	19
2018-2022	31
2022-	30

23. The Rules of Procedure do not contain any provisions on gender balance among parliamentary leadership, committee chairs and composition, parliamentary delegations’ chairs and compositions, or the parliamentary administration, which can lead to single sex committees and groups (see paragraph 26). Most survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with setting minimum representation targets for women and men in parliamentary leadership (50%), the appointment of committee chairs (58%) and for committee membership (57%).
24. The current Speaker of the Saeima is a woman. Out of the eleven Speakers since the introduction of multiparty elections in Latvia in 1991, five have been women. 60% of the current Presidium (Speaker, Deputy Speakers, Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Saeima) are women. While women occupy all three posts in the top leadership, the entirety of party faction heads are men and the significant majority of committee chairs and deputy chairs are men. The following data was reported by the Saeima in December 2024:

Position	Male	%	Female	%
Speaker and Deputy Speakers	0	0%	3	100%
Committee chairs	12	75%	4	25%
Deputy committee chairs	10	62.5%	6	37.5%
Head of party factions	7	100%	0	0%
Deputy heads of party factions	5	41.6%	7	58.4%
Secretary General	0	0%	1	100%
Secretary of the Saeima	1	100%	0	0%
Deputy Secretary of the Saeima	1	100%	0	0%

²¹ Ibid., page 13.

²² As of January 2025, according to Inter-Parliamentary Union data.

²³ Data for all convocations/elections, except the 1990 elections, obtained from the [Central Election Commission](#). Data for the 1990 election was obtained from the [IPU Parline](#) database.

25. A central aspect of parliamentary representation is gender-balanced representation in parliamentary committees. Art.152 of the Rules of Procedure outlines that committee chairs and deputy chairs are elected by the committee members and there are no requirements for gender balance. As also documented by ODIHR’s OSCE-wide study²⁴, parliamentary committees in Latvia partially conform to the stereotypical distribution of policy areas among women and men, where women are underrepresented in committees covering areas such as defence, finance, and foreign affairs and overrepresented in education and social affairs committees. One committee does not have any female members. The following data has been reported by the Saeima in December 2024:

Committee	% of women	% of men
Foreign Affairs	33	67
Budget and Finance (Taxation)	15	85
Legal Affairs	22	78
Human Rights and Public Affairs	27	73
Education, Culture, and Science	58	42
Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention	0	100
Public Administration and Local Government	2	77
Economic, Agricultural, Environmental and Regional Policy	25	75
Social and Employment Matters	70	30
Mandate, Ethics, and Submissions	21	79
Parliamentary Inquiry	31	69
Public Expenditure and Audit	47	53
National Security	14	86
Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion	13	88
European Affairs	43	57
Sustainable Development	40	60
All Committees overall	29	71

26. In order to advance gender-balanced representation, formal and informal parliamentary bodies play a central role. The Rules of Procedure do not specify a formal body mandated with gender equality issues, although there is a formal human rights committee, the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee. According to the questionnaire response provided by the parliament in December 2024, all parliamentary bodies are required to adhere to the principles of gender equality. Interviewees during the on-site visit expressed that there is a lack of clarity over the responsibility for gender equality work as responsibilities are allocated to committees informally by the Saeima. This means that, for example, it is unclear for CSOs working on gender equality, who wish to address parliament, to whom they should address their petitions.

27. There is an informal MPs group in parliament, entitled “Group for parliamentary advocacy of women’s interests”, established on 26 January 2023. The group is an informal discussion club that aims to enhance and strengthen the role of women in politics and business as well as demographic, health and family policy. The group co-operates with civil society organizations. There are currently 19 members, 18 women and 1 man, however, during the on-site interviews, it was clarified that the informal nature of the club means that the membership is open and so varies from meeting to meeting, with more men and women MPs joining the gatherings who may not be formal members. MPs mentioned that the

²⁴ Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament, ODIHR, 2021, page 26.

Group meets infrequently and usually outside the Parliament and is not used specifically as a platform for gender equality reforms in parliament. It does not have an allocated space or any strategic documents/plans.

28. Parliaments have a responsibility to ensure an environment free of gender-based violence and discrimination, for all MPs and parliamentary staff. Recommendation 10 of the Kigali Declaration recommends to “introduce stringent policies with the objective of zero tolerance of violence against women, sexual harassment and bullying in parliament, and establish independent and efficient grievance procedures with strong sanctions”.
29. MPs must adhere to the Code of Ethics of Members of the Saeima, included as an Annex to the Rules of Procedure. Art. 8 of the Code states that “A member of the Saeima shall respect human rights and shall not justify his or her reasoning by referring to the race, gender, colour, nationality, language religion, social origin, or health condition of his or her opponent”. There are no other provisions related to gender equality, however Art. 7 prohibits offensive and disrespectful words, gestures, and actions. The Code of Ethics does not contain a definition of sexual harassment.
30. Art. 179 of the Rules of Procedure outlines that the Mandate, Ethics, and Submissions Committee is responsible for supervising compliance with the Code of Ethics and investigating potential violations, with Art. 179. 7 listing the sanctions for non-compliance. However, only MPs can report violations to the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee. The Administration clarified during the on-site visit that if a member of the Saeima staff was to experience gender-based violence or discrimination then they could contact the HR Department of the Saeima administration or utilise the internal whistleblowing system. The Saeima has an internal whistleblowing system in place, where various violations can be reported, such as abuse of office, unlawful actions by officials, and threats to workplace safety. Thus far, this system has not been put to use by members of the parliamentary community.
31. The Saeima has not published any sort of guidelines on the provisions of the Code of Ethics and does not currently conduct any trainings for MPs on ethical matters, including gender-based discrimination and harassment.
32. 75% of MPs and parliamentary staff strongly disagreed or disagreed that sexist language is a part of the culture of the Saeima. Only 5% strongly agreed with this statement. Additionally, 81% strongly agreed or agreed that MPs treat parliamentary staff with respect, free of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. 2% of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement.
33. Many interviewed women and men MPs demonstrated a low awareness of the barriers to women’s full and equal political participation as well as gender equality work in general. There were several common repeated assertions, such as that gender equality work creates unnecessary extra work and bureaucracy for staff and MPs and that there are more important issues that need to be addressed in the Saeima. Gender equality was largely viewed as having been achieved in Latvia, due to the high numerical presence of women in leadership roles and Latvia’s legal framework, which gives women legal equality with men. There was a shared view that gender equality reforms would be anti-meritocratic and would mean that roles are not assigned based on competency and professionalism. In relation to this, women MPs seem to face intense pressure to appear “strong” and “competent” that their men colleagues do not. At times, a view was given that gender equality work would involve discrimination against men and there was a general lack of knowledge of the non-discriminatory nature of temporary special measures.

34. Due to these attitudes, some interviewed women and men MPs expressed that they do not feel comfortable to push for gender equality reforms as there would be too great of a backlash against them for doing so. The perception was that it would be impossible to raise gender equality issues due to the resistance that they would face.
35. Some MPs expressed that there is a “boys club” culture in parliament. As mentioned above, all the party faction heads are currently men, leading to a lot of informal deal-making being done exclusively by men. It should be noted that this situation seems to be somewhat of an anomaly as in the past there has been a good representation of women. There are also informal social forums for MPs, such as sports teams, in which only men MPs participate in. However, there are cultural activities, such as a choir, that women MPs do participate in.
36. All interviewed MPs reported that it is common to experience online harassment and violence and there was some consensus that women MPs experienced unique forms of online harassment, such as threats of sexual violence, threats against their families, and hate speech concentrating on their appearance. Men politicians who supported the ratification of the Istanbul Convention reported receiving homophobic attacks online, regardless of their sexual orientation. The Progressive Party has recently proposed an amendment to the law on hate speech that would expand what types of hate speech that can be prosecuted in Latvia.
37. The parliament does not monitor the participation rates of women and men MPs, in the plenary session or committee meetings, during law-making or oversight activities. However, the administration does generate statistics on how often and for how long MPs speak, which could be disaggregated by sex. Some interviewees expressed that speaking time in the plenary can be dominated by men at times.
38. MPs and staff take parental leave in accordance with the provisions in the Labour Law, namely Art.154 on pregnancy and maternity leave and Art.155 on parental leave for fathers, adopted parents and other persons. Art.29.5 of the Labour Law states that less favourable treatment due to the granting of maternity or paternity leave is considered direct discrimination. The Saeima does not collect statistics on MPs and staff who take parental leave.
39. Art.5 of the Rules of Procedure guarantees the right to prenatal, maternity, paternity, adoption, and parental leave for all MPs, according to the Labour Law. The Saeima administration clarified that MPs on parental leave can choose whether they wish to leave their mandate and reinstate it when they return. Parental leave would automatically mean pausing the mandate and for the fraction temporarily losing an MP, which, theoretically, can create pressure on MP not to take the leave if, for example, the ruling coalition has only one vote majority, as is currently the case. If not, MPs retain their constitutional powers and can come back to vote in parliament, enshrined in Art. 5 of the Rules of Procedure. There have been several cases of MPs on maternity leave taking advantage of this. During parental leave, MPs do not receive remuneration from the Saeima but are entitled to either a maternity or parental allowance and they retain employee status, which ensures eligibility for the corresponding social guarantees.
40. During one of the focus groups of the on-site visit, MPs and staff reported some legal difficulties for MPs who are parents. For example, if an MP wishes to receive a childcare benefit, then they can no longer serve as an MP. Additionally, due to restrictions on incompatibilities for MPs, an MP cannot serve as a caretaker for their disabled child.
41. The Saeima does not have any regulations on sitting times. However, sittings typically run until 6pm but MPs can vote to extend sitting time. MPs reported during the interviews that

this is almost never done. Sittings are largely aligned with the school calendar, although this is not included in a regulation. The Presidium takes steps to plan ahead to help MPs with family responsibilities. A recent change was implemented in regards to the annual budget vote, which traditionally has run until the early hours of the following morning. An informal practice has now been implemented, ensuring that the vote ends at a reasonable hour so that MPs can go home to their families.

42. The Saeima is introducing a children's room in June 2025. Smaller children will need to be left with a designated adult but MPs and staff will be allowed to bring their work into the room in order to supervise their children. A baby changing table is available in the main building of the Saeima. The parliament does not have specific arrangements in place for breastfeeding mothers. In addition, some MPs voiced that breastfeeding during the plenary may be perceived as "indecent" behaviour and be scrutinised under the current Code of Ethics, exposing an additional barrier in parliamentary culture. There is also no financial assistance available for parliamentarians for childcare, or travel allowances for family members intended for travel between the constituency and parliament.
43. There are also no formal arrangements in place for alternative voting for parliamentarians with care responsibilities. However, committees have different allowances for remote work, with some allowing participating via Zoom for discussions and/ or voting. Flexible working hours and distance work are available for MPs and staff, according to provisions in the Labour Law. Staff members can work remotely two days a week. MPs reported that Mondays and Fridays are largely flexible days in the parliamentary calendar, where they could work from home.
44. Positively, 63% of those MPs and parliamentary staff surveyed strongly disagreed or disagreed that family caring responsibilities are a barrier for staff in undertaking certain roles in parliament. Only 2% strongly agreed with this statement. Additionally, 60% strongly disagreed or disagreed that family caring responsibilities are a barrier for staff in obtaining promotion.
45. Parliament's public relations team currently does not make dedicated efforts to ensure that there is gender balance in terms of the Saeima's public outputs. The team highlighted during the on-site visit that they report factually on what happens in parliament and so cannot ensure gender-sensitive reporting. The press team does run informal campaigns on social media and expressed during interviews that one could theoretically be run on a topic related to gender equality, especially as one performance indicator of the current Saeima Operational Strategy 2025-2027 is to run more campaigns on "socially responsible issues of public interest". Previously, press releases have been issued on women in the Saeima.
46. Meeting rooms in the parliamentary building have gender-neutral names. Art presented in the building is extensive and documented, but there is no analysis on who is portrayed or if there any policies that would preclude gender bias in selection of artists.
47. So far, the parliament has not run awareness-raising activities on gender equality and gender-related capacity development nor on preventing bullying and harassment in the workplace for MPs or staff. One exception might be a seminar that was run on men's mental health. The Saeima administration does regularly run trainings and gives staff access to online courses on wellbeing and fostering a positive work environment. Staff have a duty to attend these trainings and report on their attendance at the end of the year. If a certain training is not available, then staff can propose it themselves. The State Administration School provides activities on certain topics for administration staff. During the visit, the administration expressed readiness to explore if there was a need to integrate trainings on gender equality into the current programme.

48. Trainings on gender equality would be given by the Ministry of Welfare. The Ministry of Welfare has reported that they are preparing a training programme for civil servants and public officials to enhance their capacity to integrate equal opportunities and non-discrimination principles into policy planning, implementation and evaluation processes, with a training module on best practices in gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. This is planned to be implemented from 2024 to 2029. During the on-site visit, the Saeima reported that they had reached out to the Ministry to secure their own involvement in the training as a result of the audit.
49. As per data presented by the Saeima, in 2023 59% of the parliamentary administration were women and 41% were men. The current Secretary General is a woman.
50. The Rules for Selection of the Employees of the Saeima Administration require that employee selection complies with the Labour Law, which contains the principle of equal rights (Art.7) and prohibits discriminatory treatment (Art.29). The Regulations of the Saeima Administration, and the By-Laws of the Saeima Administration do not contain any provisions on gender equality and non-discrimination.
51. The Internal Regulations on the Work Procedures of the Saeima Administration and Other Structural Units of the Saeima require that staff adhere to generally accepted norms of ethics and to avoid expressing aggressive opinions or hate speech but contain no reference to gender-sensitive behaviour.
52. Annual surveys are conducted of Saeima staff, including on questions related to a positive and inclusive work environment. Last year's results were overwhelmingly positive. Interviewed staff expressed that they feel comfortable and safe in the workplace, with women stating that they do not feel any barriers due to their gender. They credited this to the favourable working culture in the administration and the trainings offered to staff. According to staff, they have a congenial working relationship with MPs.
53. During the interviews, some staff expressed that they feel pressure to work overtime and to come in even when they are sick, as there is a large amount of work to be done and there is no one who could provide cover for them. This was reported to be an issue when taking parental leave or if parents need to take time off to care for children. As a result, interviewees mentioned that some departments, especially the legal department, are composed of older women and young men as young mothers would not be able to balance work and family commitments.

Recommendations

In order to improve gender-sensitive parliamentary representation and ensure a gradual but ambitious and continuous progress towards gender-balanced representation, on all levels of government and with the parliament as a whole, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration of the parliamentary leadership:

- A) Consider setting up a Speaker's Advisory Group on Gender Equality in Parliament, tasked to take the 'gender-sensitive parliaments' and gender mainstreaming process forward, aiming at transforming the report's recommendations into a high-impact, realistic and multi-year Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality in the Saeima.
- B) Set gender parity (50:50) as a representation goal for the parliament and consider additional legal measures (temporary special measures) to achieve this goal gradually and over the next few convocations.
- C) Establish the Parliament to act as one of the main democratic institutions in the political system promoting gender-sensitive participation on all levels and branches of governance. These could include, for example:
 - a. Running every year, a plenary session dedicated solely to the topic of gender equality advancement;
 - b. Running regular cross-party events to inspire political parties on voluntary actions they can take;
 - c. Strengthening the existing cross-party parliamentary group, which can bring on board reform-minded female and male MPs interested in advancing gender equality;
 - d. Preparing a welcome booklet for all new MPs and staff, which raises awareness on the importance of gender equality and provides diverse examples on how gender equality is to be taken into account for parliamentary representation, lawmaking and oversight²⁵;
 - e. Running regular outreach and awareness-raising activities, including through the Saeima's press team, promoting gender equality through recognition of gender equality achievements and champions, artistic and cultural activities or other initiatives in the parliament.
- D) Review the existing Rules of Procedure and consider:
 - a. Introducing minimal and realistic representation targets for female and male MPs in all parliamentary working bodies and parliamentary delegations;
 - b. Introducing minimal representation targets for leadership roles, including leadership of parliamentary working bodies;
 - c. Introducing clear and detailed procedural standards for key participatory mechanisms, aimed at ensuring and proactively facilitating participation of women and women's rights organizations and other equality-focused civil society actors, throughout the parliament's work.
- E) Review the existing Code of Ethics and consider:
 - a. Including explicit provisions on gender-based violence, discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment, as well as clear reporting, disciplinary procedures, and sanctions that apply to the entire parliamentary community;
 - b. Developing and disseminating a guidance document for MPs and staff on the ethical framework and the procedures in place for reporting, investigating, and sanctioning

²⁵ See example of guide prepared for MPs in the Assembly in North Macedonia [Gender Matters! Manual for Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Staff on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#), Assembly of North Macedonia and OSCE Mission to Skopje, 2021.

- violations, including those related to gender-based violence, discrimination, and sexual harassment;
- c. Conducting regular awareness raising, training and research among MPs and staff, related to gender equality, gender-based violence and discrimination, including sexual harassment;
- F) Kick off a cross-party dialogue aiming at identifying formal and informal measures that can be taken in order to ensure a broader representation of underrepresented groups, including of women and men of underrepresented age groups, with disabilities and of ethnic minority background.
 - G) Consider expanding the annual perceptions and attitudes survey to include both MPs and staff and making the results disaggregated by sex, aiming at better understanding barriers and challenges to full and equal participation of women and men. Use the results of the survey to advance rules, mechanisms and practices related to gender sensitivity.
 - H) Introduce the monitoring of sex-disaggregated data when it comes to participation practices, including on speaking time, and start issuing publicly available reports. Based on the data, assess if there is a need for additional measures to be taken, aiming at making the parliament a gender-balanced institution.
 - I) Implement more measures for MPs and staff with caring responsibilities, such as financial assistance for parliamentarians for childcare, travel allowances for family members intended for travel between the constituency and parliament, and alternative voting arrangements.

DIMENSION 2: GENDER-SENSITIVE LAWMAKING

54. Legislation has a profound impact on everyday life, on people's rights and livelihoods. Democratic lawmaking is defined by ODIHR as a process, which is "open, transparent, accessible, non-discriminatory, gender-responsive, inclusive, representative, participatory and sensitive to the needs of diverse groups in society".²⁶ Furthermore, the "legislative process should be inclusive and integrate gender and diversity perspectives throughout the legislative cycle to ensure fair results and a positive impact on gender equality, diversity and human rights".²⁷ All interested parties and stakeholders should have the opportunity to access the lawmaking process, to be informed about it and to meaningfully participate and contribute. Consultations are one means of interacting with the public, in addition to information-sharing and participation, the latter implying greater involvement. Different groups and individuals, especially those who may be affected by the draft law, as well as stakeholder organizations should be identified early and included from the initial policymaking phase and throughout the lawmaking process.
55. Gender-sensitive lawmaking also involves using tools and mechanisms, such as ex ante gender impact assessments, sex-disaggregated data, gender-sensitive budgeting, gender-sensitive language, gender-sensitive lawmaking trainings for public officials and staff involved in the lawmaking process, and consultations with external experts, such as academics and civil society organizations.²⁸
56. The importance of incorporating a gender perspective into lawmaking processes has been emphasised in numerous international standards and OSCE human dimension commitments, which Latvia has committed to. Specifically, Latvia has committed to implementing the 1995 Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, that stresses the importance of mechanisms for gender equality and advocate for a fundamental shift in the approach to gender equality, emphasising the integration of gender perspectives into the creation of public policies and of legislation, and equal gender participation in decision-making processes.
57. The 1997 Resolution of the UN Economic and Social Council defines gender mainstreaming as: "The process of accessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality".²⁹
58. The international commitment to gender mainstreaming in decision and policy-making have not been transferred into national legislation. However, in 2001, the Government published the Concept Paper on the Implementation of Gender Equality, which underlined

²⁶ [Guidelines on Democratic Lawmaking for Better Laws](#), ODIHR, 2024, page 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, page 17.

²⁸ See Chapter 8, "Gender and Diversity Considerations" of ²⁸ [Guidelines on Democratic Lawmaking for Better Laws](#), ODIHR, 2024 and see also [Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region](#), ODIHR, 2021.

²⁹ [UN Economic and Social Council Resolution 1997/2: Agreed Conclusions](#), UN Economic and Social Council, 18 July 1997.

that gender mainstreaming is necessary for the promotion of gender equality.³⁰ This Concept paper was then used as a basis for developing Latvia's further national gender equality strategies and action plans.

59. The Plan for the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-2027 contains “integrating the principle of gender equality into policy planning processes”, as one of the three directions of actions. The Gender Equality Committee within the Ministry of Welfare is responsible for carrying out the Plan. The Ministry of Welfare reported in 2024 that “the main emerging challenge in the area of gender equality policy is the lack of gender mainstreaming in all sectoral policies”, especially in areas which are not clearly related to gender equality, such as finance, climate, energy, and agriculture.³¹
60. The listed challenges with the application of gender mainstreaming in policy making are impacting significantly the lawmaking process, as the majority draft laws are coming from the government. Para.16.c. of the latest CEDAW Concluding Observations calls on Latvia to “ensure that gender impact assessments systematically form an integral part of the legislative process”.³² Gender impact assessments are not included in Art.85.5 of the Rules of Procedure on the impact assessments and accompanying documents that must be submitted when a draft law is proposed by the Saeima President, a committee, or members. However, when draft laws and other regulatory legal acts arrive in the Saeima from the government, as the vast majority do, it is a requirement that they must be accompanied by a gender impact assessment in the explanatory note, according to Art. 9.9 of the 2021 Regulation of the Cabinet Ministers No.617 on the Procedure for Evaluating the Initial Impact of the Draft Legal Act.³³ These are then scrutinised by committees and Legal Bureau staff.
61. Parliamentary staff reported that the overwhelming majority of draft laws come from the executive, where the ministries are in charge of preparing the entire package of documents and the parliament has minimal possibilities to change them. The Saeima reported in the questionnaire responses that gender impact assessments of draft laws are not always being done. During the on-site visit, MPs and legal staff in the Saeima relayed that gender impact assessments in explanatory notes that come from the government are in almost all cases sparsely and formalistically completed, including the on the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2024. It was expressed that there is no supervision or oversight of the completion of these assessments within the parliament.
62. In the latest CEDAW Concluding Observations, it is recommended for Latvia to “adopt comprehensive gender-based budgeting strategies at the national and local levels that provide for specific budgeting allocations for the implementation of policies, strategies and programmes on gender equality and the advancement of women” (Para.16.d).³⁴ A gender impact assessment is required when reviewing budgets. This is not mentioned in Chapter 2 of the Rules of Procedure on legislative procedures, including reviewing draft budget laws. However, the 2018 Cabinet of Ministers Instruction No.2 on the Analysis of the Execution of the State Budget affirms that budgets will be evaluated according to indicators including

³⁰ Concept Paper on the Implementation of Gender Equality, Government of the Republic of Latvia, 2001.

³¹ National Report of the Republic of Latvia on the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia, 2024, page 56 and page 4.

³² Concluding observations on the combined 4th to 7th periodic reports of Latvia, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 10 March 2020, page 5.

³³ Regulation of the Cabinet Ministers No.617 on the Procedure for Evaluating the Initial Impact of the Draft Legal Act, Government of the Republic of Latvia, 2021.

³⁴ Concluding observations on the combined 4th to 7th periodic reports of Latvia, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 10 March 2020, page 6.

performance indicators by gender (Art.18.11).³⁵ According to the instruction, this analysis is done by the ministries themselves. The Ministry of Justice reported in 2024 that “the integration of the gender aspect in budget processes has not been systematically practiced and implemented in Latvia”.³⁶

63. However, this instruction relates to government budgets and there is no regulation on gender-responsive budgeting at the parliamentary level. 52% of the survey respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that parliament is examining the budget bill from a gender perspective. Interviewed MPs reported that gender-responsive budgeting is not being done in the Saeima. The Budget Committee is currently exploring moving towards performance-based budgeting, which would include indicators based on gender, but this has been difficult to implement.
64. 49% of survey respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that gender equality considerations are not taken into account when reviewing the budget or new laws. However, 43% of survey respondents did not answer this question, indicating a lack of awareness in the topic or a lack of interest. Only 8% strongly agreed with this statement. 52% of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that parliament is examining the budget bill from a gender perspective, out of the 177 who responded to this question.
65. Art. 169.1 of the Rules of Procedure gives standing committees the right to invite experts to their meetings, both independently and for individual cases. It highlights that experts will act in the capacity of advisers. According to information provided by the Saeima, parliament does have formal relationships with academic gender experts, women’s civil society organizations, and women’s media outlets. In the questionnaire, the Saeima responded that they never work with the Ministry of Welfare’s Gender Equality Unit, the government’s gender equality machinery. Although during the interviews, several MPs and members of staff mentioned some co-operation with these bodies, especially in the case of new trainings being developed and utilising their expertise to examine gender impact assessments.
66. There are no regulations on cooperation between parliament and civil society, so it can fluctuate from convocation to convocation and committee to committee. Positively, 61% of MPs and parliamentary staff strongly agreed or agreed that parliament has good cooperation with civil society organisations working on gender equality (out of the 185 respondents who answered this question). Members of CSOs who attended the workshop during the on-site visit expressed that they have a close working relationship with the parliament and that MPs are easily accessible and open to working with civil society. Interviewed MPs echoed this view. The Saeima holds an annual NGO forum for CSOs.
67. Within the parliamentary administration, there is no gender equality unit or staff post which would be solely responsible for gender equality concerns and that could insist analysis and other tasks related to gender-sensitive lawmaking.
68. There are currently no regulations that legislation should be written in gender-sensitive language, but in practice there were efforts to use gendered nouns. Latvian is a gendered language and based on interviews, the language is very inclusive, with feminines for all key positions being widely used.
69. There is no legal requirement for the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) or other public institutions to collect sex-disaggregated data but it is being done. Sex-disaggregated data is

³⁵ Cabinet of Ministers Instruction No.2 on the Analysis of the Execution of the State Budget, Government of the Republic of Latvia, 2018.

³⁶ National Report of the Republic of Latvia on the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia, 2024, page 42.

available in the CSB's Statistical Yearbook and also on the official statistics portal, which has a section on gender statistics. Datasets can be viewed online and downloaded. Once every three years, the CSB publishes a collection of sex-disaggregated data entitled "Women and Men in Latvia".

70. The Plan for 2024-27 mentions that "the gender differences showed in the statistics [sex-disaggregated data] are often not taken into account in order to facilitate targeted support measures or the revision of existing measures". In addition, it notes that "there are a number of areas in which statistical data or research is insufficient, especially when it comes to relatively new areas of statistics and social policy- cyber violence, involvement in the latest technologies, multiple forms of discrimination". In the latest Concluding Observations, the CEDAW Committee recommended that Latvia strengthen its collection of sex-disaggregated data in Paras. 26.c, 32, 34.d, and 41. From the on-site visit, it appears that sex-disaggregated data is not systematically used during the legislative process or in the work of the Saeima.

Recommendations

In order to improve gender-sensitive law-making practices, including the cooperation with civil society organisations, and to ensure that gender impact assessments are conducted in a meaningful and systematic way, following recommendations are put forward for the consideration of the parliamentary leadership:

- J) Review the existing Rules of Procedure and consider:
 - a. Explicitly mandating one standing committee to take the lead on gender equality in lawmaking, while keeping the horizontal approach to gender mainstreaming being part of the role of all committees. In recognition also of the workload of the existing standing committees, the parliament may want to consider expanding the mandate of the Committee on Human Rights and Public Affairs to include gender equality;
 - b. Strengthening existing and introducing new provisions related to gender-sensitive lawmaking, including related to the state budget;
 - c. Ensure that every draft law, regardless of the proposer, is accompanied by an impact assessment that includes a gender analysis based on sex-disaggregated data, and establish a quality control mechanism within the relevant parliamentary body to assess the adequacy of this analysis before the draft is deliberated. Where the analysis is missing or insufficient, the proposal should be returned to the initiator for revision;
 - d. Introducing provisions to ensure structured and transparent consultation with women's rights organizations, gender experts, and relevant civil society actors during the lawmaking process, including formal mechanisms for feedback and continuity of engagement across convocations.

- K) Review the existing lawmaking practices to reflect gender equality and diversity perspectives, aiming at gradually introducing a more comprehensive approach. Consider:
 - a. Expanding staffing capacities in the parliamentary administration, aiming at setting up a gender equality and gender mainstreaming unit/team;
 - b. Introducing introductory, regular and advanced capacity development initiatives, aiming at strengthening the capacities of parliamentary staff related to gender equality and gender mainstreaming;
 - c. Producing hands-on guidelines for all parliamentary committees as well as holding orientation seminars, at the beginning of every convocation, on gender equality, gender mainstreaming, gender-sensitive legislation and gender impact assessments;

- L) Strengthen co-operation with government bodies, including the state statistical body and the Ministry in charge for gender equality policy, aiming at advancing sex-disaggregated data collection and a more proactive gender mainstreaming approach by ministries and government bodies, especially when preparing laws and other documents for the consideration of the Saeima.

DIMENSION 3:

GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT

71. Gender-sensitive oversight involves overseeing and monitoring the implementation of legislation, budgets, policies, programmes and other actions, including those taken or not taken by the government, from a gender perspective. This assists parliaments with “exploring and addressing the potential and real impacts on men and women of laws, policies, programmes and budgets to ensure the impacts are fair and the laws are effective”.³⁷
72. Gender mainstreaming in the oversight function of national parliaments “involves asking questions about the impact that government policies, programmes, budgetary allocations and expenditures will have or have had on women and girls as well as on men and boys. It assesses whether gender-blind or gender-biased assumptions have been made about the beneficiaries of a process or policy, who the process or policy target is, and whether all groups will benefit equitably”.³⁸
73. Art. 24 of the Constitution gives Saeima committees the “right to require of individual Ministers or local government authorities information and explanations necessary for the work of the committees and the right to invite to their sittings responsible representatives from the relevant ministers or local government authorities to furnish explanations”. Art. 27 provides the Saeima with the “right to submit to the Prime Minister or to an individual Minister requests and questions which either they, or a responsible government official duly authorised by them, must answer”. It also outlines that “the Prime Minister or any Minister shall furnish the relevant documents and enactments requested by the Saeima or any of its committees”.
74. The Rules of Procedure do not contain specific reference to gender-sensitive oversight. Art.118 of the Rules of Procedure states that the Prime Minister submits a yearly report on the results and intended activities of the Cabinet to the Saeima for their examination. The Minister for Foreign Affairs similarly submits an annual report to the Saeima. Art. 119 ascertains that at least five MPs can submit a question to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, or a minister on matters related to their competence.
75. Art. 172 gives Saeima committees the right to “directly, without mediation of the Presidium, request information and explanation necessary for their activities from a relevant Minister and institutions subordinate to him or her”. Interviewed MPs reported that they were always able to submit questions or requests to ministers that were answered in a timely manner.
76. As stated in the ‘Dimension 2’ chapter, the Saeima reported that they do not have a separate body mandated with gender equality, but rather that it is included in all parliamentary bodies. There is not a body formally tasked with overseeing the implementation of CEDAW and Latvia’s other international obligations in the field of gender equality, although interviewees suggested that this would be included in the remit of the Committee on Human Rights and Public Affairs. The Legal Bureau reviews draft legal acts for compliance with Latvia’s international commitments but interviews revealed that this is not being systematically done for commitments related to gender equality, such as CEDAW. 44% of

³⁷ Gender-Sensitive Scrutiny: A Guide to More Effective Law-making and Oversight, International IDEA, 2022, page 9.

³⁸ Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament, ODIHR, 2021, page 55.

survey respondents answered that they did not know if Parliament effectively monitors compliance with CEDAW and Latvia's other international commitments on gender equality.

77. When asked if gender is integrated into oversight activities, 48% of survey respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. Additionally, 60% strongly disagreed or disagreed that there is clear leadership on gender equality issues through a committee designated with a gender equality mandate.
78. Interviewed MPs and staff demonstrated a low level of awareness of gender-sensitive oversight. It is not being done in the Saeima, including monitoring of Latvia's international obligations in the field of gender equality and oversight of budget implementation. Interviewees reported that there has been no oversight of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention since its ratification in 2024.

Recommendations

In order to improve gender-sensitive oversight practices and to ensure that gender equality considerations become part of the regular committee work, the following recommendations are put forward for the consideration of the parliamentary leadership:

- M) Review the existing Rules of Procedure and consider:
 - a. Explicitly mandating one standing committee to take the lead on gender equality in parliamentary, while keeping the horizontal approach to gender mainstreaming being part of the role of all committees. In recognition also of the workload of the existing standing committees, the parliament may want to consider expanding the mandate of the Committee on Human Rights and Public Affairs to include gender equality;
 - b. Formalising the oversight of the implementation of international conventions, such as CEDAW, and the recommendations arising from treaty bodies, like the CEDAW Committee;
 - c. Mapping new and regular oversight activities, initiated by the parliament and going beyond the consideration of the regular reports submitted by the government;
 - d. Selecting one existing law each year for systematic gender equality review as part of a post-legislative oversight exercise conducted independently by the parliament;
- N) Develop a guide, manual or booklet with good practices and ideas on how committees can integrate a gender equality perspective into oversight activities;
- O) Through the parliamentary oversight function, aim at strengthening the governmental institutional mechanism for the advancement of women and of gender equality, as the central body for gender equality policy in the government;
- P) Apply a proactive approach to civil society cooperation, aiming at involving civil society representatives into the application of the diverse set of potential oversight tools that can be applied related to gender-sensitive oversight.
- Q) Use national gender equality expertise, including in academia, in the activities of the parliament's oversight activities.

6. TAKING THE GENDER AUDIT FORWARD:

SPEAKER'S ADVISORY GROUP ON GENDER EQUALITY IN PARLIAMENT

Gender audits are just the beginning or a milestone in the institutional transformation process of a parliament. In order to build upon the conclusions and recommendations from the gender audit report, one **key recommendation** of this report is central: the setup of a Speaker's Advisory Group on Gender Equality in Parliament³⁹ after the publishing of the Participatory Gender Audit report. The Advisory Group is to take the process forward, aiming at transforming the report's recommendations into a high-impact, realistic and result-orientation Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality in the Saeima (see chapter 7). This aligns with Recommendation 2 of the Kigali Declaration: to create a gender-balanced steering committee to follow up on the findings and recommendations of gender audits.

Who should be part of the Advisory Group?

As parliaments are organisations that apply horizontal and collective decision-making, it is central that all parliamentary political parties appoint (two) members to the Advisory Group. Ideally, those members should not be of the same sex. The Advisory Group should ideally also have representatives of the parliamentary service, under the leadership of the Secretary General. The Advisory Group should meet on regular basis, aiming at keeping the 'gender sensitive parliaments' momentum for change alive and producing concrete results, as per the recommendations from the audit report.

What role should it play?

The central role of the Advisory Group is to ensure that gender audit report recommendations are transformed into impact-oriented activities. Ideally, the parliament should develop a multi-year gender action plan for the implementation of the recommendations, and the role of the Advisory Group is to ensure swift approval of the gender action plan, its implementation and regular review. The Advisory Group should report regularly to the entire parliament.

What should be tasks of the Advisory Group members?

The members of the Advisory Group serve as a link between the parliamentary political parties and the parliament leadership. Members are to advocate for the support to concrete solutions among the members of the party factions they belong too, but also to be the voice of the factions in the Advisory Group.

³⁹ See a good practice example from Sweden: [Gender equality work in the Riksdag](#)

7. TEMPLATE FOR THE ACTION PLAN ON THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE SAEIMA

The below table presents an example of an action plan which the Saeima may use as a template to develop a full, multi-year action plan on the promotion of gender equality in the parliament. The action plan would systematize the implementation of all or a selection of the recommendations provided in the report on the participatory gender assessment.

Objective 1: To continuously advance the representation of women in parliament and develop a gender-sensitive working environment for all women and men working in parliament

Activity	Indicator of success	Baseline and target	Parliamentary body or unit in charge	Time frame

Objective 2: To strengthen policies, rules and practices on gender-sensitive law-making

Activity	Indicator of success	Baseline and target	Parliamentary body or unit in charge	Time frame

Objective 3: To advance the role of parliament in overseeing government actions related to gender equality enhancement in all areas of life

Activity	Indicator of success	Baseline and target	Parliamentary body or unit in charge	Time frame

Appendix 1. Results of the Perception and Attitudes Survey

The parliament conducted a perception and attitudes survey among MPs and parliamentary staff (December 2024-February 2025). 312 MPs and staff members responded to the survey. Of those that answered the questions corresponding to their identity, 191 of the respondents were women. 44 of the respondents were MPs, 227 were parliamentary staff, the rest did not provide their title (see Appendix 1). Not all respondents responded to all the question with the average response rate being 192 out of 312 responding and ranging from the lowest response rate of 162 to the highest of 212. Respondents were asked to rate the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

	1	2	3	4	5	Total respondents
GENDER-SENSITIVE REPRESENTATION						
Women and men should both have at least 40% representation in parliament.	54	26	59	32	41	212
Parliament needs to introduce representation targets for women and men in parliamentary leadership.	68	38	59	30	16	211
Parliament needs to introduce representation targets for women and men in the appointment of the committee chairs.	79	44	59	17	12	211
A minimal representation of female and male MPs should be guaranteed for all committees.	78	43	46	26	20	213
Parliament's conditions of work allow MPs to balance work and family obligations.	7	18	62	53	62	202
Sexist language in parliament is part of the organisational culture.	130	29	29	12	11	211
Female and male MPs should receive gender equality induction training after every election.	63	40	53	29	24	209
MPs treat parliamentary staff with respect, free of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination.	4	10	24	56	110	204
The parliament is recognized publicly as a central institution that promotes gender equality.	33	40	65	32	27	197
Male and female staff have equal access to family friendly working arrangements.	8	15	36	46	92	197
Family caring responsibilities are a barrier for staff in undertaking certain roles in parliament.	79	48	43	28	4	202
Family caring responsibilities are a barrier for staff in obtaining promotion.	77	47	49	26	5	204
GENDER-SENSITIVE LAW-MAKING						
Gender considerations and sex-disaggregated data are not taken into account when reviewing the budget or new laws.	42	26	63	33	15	179
Parliament examines the draft budget law from a gender perspective.	56	36	57	17	11	177

Parliament needs to introduce obligatory gender impact assessments for draft legislation.	52	40	66	20	13	191
The parliamentary service and parliamentary staff serve as a resource on gender equality.	23	20	78	26	33	180
Parliament has good co-operation with women's civil society organisations and those working on gender equality and human rights.	4	9	59	60	53	185
GENDER-SENSITIVE OVERSIGHT						
There is clear leadership in parliament on gender equality through a designated committee.	71	27	49	14	4	165
Gender is mainstreamed into oversight activities such as questions and parliamentary debate.	38	41	53	22	8	162
There are effective links between parliament and women's civil society organizations.	6	11	50	56	42	165
Parliament effectively monitors government compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international gender equality and women's rights treaties.	7	26	73	34	25	165

Appendix 2. Assessment Areas

As per ODIHR’s participatory gender assessment of parliaments methodology.

The full methodology is available in the publication:

“Participatory Gender Audits. A step-by-step guidance document for OSCE Parliaments”

ODIHR, August 2022, <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/524226>>

1.1 Gender-sensitive representation

Subject	Issues
Electing women to parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proportion and numbers of women and men in parliament in recent elections • Barriers women face when running for parliament • Actions by political parties to improve gender equality and representation of women, including tackling violence against women in politics • The electoral system and temporary special measures in electoral legislation
Leadership roles in parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proportion of each sex in leadership roles such as speakers, committee chairs or in the parliamentary administration
Participation in parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation by sex, including speaking, asking questions and being members of committees
Caring responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The infrastructure for MPs and staff with caring responsibilities, including sitting times and the provision of child care
Dignity and respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal mechanisms — codes of conduct and regulations including policies on discrimination and harassment • Cultural issues — stereotypes and demeaning behaviour • Sharing responsibility for equality by women and men
Parliamentary staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of each sex in the parliament’s staff, including in leadership positions, and whether roles reflect gender-stereotypical views of men and women

1.2 Gender-sensitive law-making

Subject	Issues
Gender sensitivity in law-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to relevant sex-disaggregated data • Availability of a checklist or other practical tools for gender-sensitive legislative scrutiny • Requirements for gender analysis and gender impact assessments • Requirement for consultations with beneficiaries of laws, including civil society organizations, representing different interests and groups • Use of gender-sensitive language, i.e., a gender-neutral and/or gender-inclusive approach when formulating legal provisions,

	and compliance with human rights and gender-equality standards in the content/substance of the laws
Gender sensitivity in reviewing the budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to relevant sex-disaggregated data and also disaggregated by numerous other personal characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, race, religion or disability • Requirements for gender analysis and gender impact assessments • The rights and needs of women and men, and of groups representing minorities, people with disabilities and others, are reflected in supporting budgetary documentation
Gender impact assessment expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of in-house expertise to help ensure that law-making activities support the elimination of all forms of gender-based discrimination • Availability of external expertise to complement in-house expertise

1.3 Gender-sensitive oversight

Subject	Issue
Parliamentary bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence, format and mandate of parliamentary bodies in charge of gender equality
Gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-equality considerations in questions, debates and committee work and in diverse forms of oversight activities, to protect law drafters against unconscious bias and to ensure laws cover everyone equally • Availability of sex-disaggregated data • Gender balance in public hearings
Expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of in-house expertise to ensure that activities support the elimination of all forms of gender-based discrimination • Availability of external expertise to complement in-house expertise
International standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring compliance with international standards and norms, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Appendix 3. Excerpt from IPU Kigali Declaration

Parliamentarians from around the world have adopted the Kigali Declaration “Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world” at the 145th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda.

The full Declaration is available at the following link

<<https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2022-10/ipu-member-parliaments-commit-accelerating-gender-equality>>

Here is an excerpt of the ten commitments at the end of the Declaration:

“Our commitment to gender-sensitive parliaments today must be more ambitious than it was 10 years ago. Looking forward, we pledge the following 10 actions to make many more parliaments gender-sensitive over the next 10 years:

1. Assess the level of gender-sensitivity of our parliaments twice to ensure progress in-between the two milestones.
2. Create a gender-balanced steering committee to follow up on the findings and recommendations of the gender sensitivity assessments that has the power, resources, and mandate to lead reforms.
3. Recognize the individual differences among women and prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented groups such as young women, indigenous women and women with disabilities.
4. Create, resource and empower a gender equality committee or similar body which can effectively hold government and parliament to account, and a women’s caucus that can effectively support women MPs in their parliamentary work.
5. Adopt formal rules to establish gender-balance across all parliamentary leadership positions, ensure the parity of participation of women and men across all parliamentary activities, and prohibit single-sex committees and groups.
6. Engage men MPs and other men active in the parliamentary ecosystem to act as allies for gender equality, including by co-sponsoring bills, initiatives and actions with women MPs, across the legislative, oversight and representation fields.
7. Ensure that gender sensitivity, gender equality and gender mainstreaming and budgeting guide all of a parliament’s work at all times.
8. Conduct gender audits of legislative, budgetary and oversight actions but also of initiatives aiming to introduce or reform, inter alia, parliamentary technology, measures to make parliaments greener, initiatives to engage citizens’ in the work of parliament, and implement the respective recommendations from such audits.
9. Become caring parliaments by providing fully for the caring needs of men and women MPs and staff as they carry out their parliamentary duties.
10. Introduce stringent policies with the objective of zero tolerance of violence against women, sexual harassment and bullying in parliament, and establish independent and efficient grievance procedures with strong sanctions.”