

PART IV: Conclusions and Forward-Looking Strategies

Throughout the pages of this report various steps have been suggested for improving the way that gender issues are addressed in Latvia, and thus for the ultimate improvement of gender equality and relations as a necessary precursor for sustainable human development. These suggestions have been both general and concrete, and they have pertained to both Government actions, civil society activities and the efforts of individual men and women in society more generally. In the articulation of these suggestions, various key themes have come up time and again, in virtually all areas of this report. For the purpose of summarizing then, these six key themes are listed below, highlighting again why they matter for gender and human development in Latvia. Some concrete recommendations as well as more general strategies are also summarized below.

I Strengthening the National Machinery for Addressing Gender Issues: It is evident that there is a current lack of capacity within the national Government to effectively address concerns that relate to gender. While several positive steps have been taken, there is still much to accomplish in terms of both political commitment and action.

Immediate recommendations include:

- the drafting and approval of a National Strategy for Gender Equality in Latvia. This should be coordinated by the Focal Point within the Ministry of Welfare, but all government partners must be involved in this process. (All other recommendations listed in Part IV should be incorporated into this comprehensive strategy in the form of a workplan with specifically designated responsibilities).
- capacity building for the Gender Focal Point in the Ministry of Welfare, as well as for Focal Points in other ministries. Medium-term goals should include gender training at all levels of decision-making, including the Saeima, the Cabinet of Ministers and civil servants. Capacity building at the local government level is also necessary.
- the establishment of an Interministerial Commission on Gender Issues. This should be comprised of high-level government officials. Its function would be to discuss proposals put forth by the advisory board (see below) or by focal points and to make necessary policy decisions.
- the establishment of a National Advisory Board on Gender Issues. The Board should be comprised of non-governmental activists, academics

and other individuals with substantive gender expertise. The role of the Board would be to serve in an advisory capacity to both focal points within the ministries and to the Interministerial Commission. Furthermore, the creation of such a board would encourage participatory practices of decision-making and governance, while helping to build capacity within the government.

II Improving Attention to Gender in Public Policy — moving towards gender mainstreaming and holistic policy making: One of the definite focuses of this report was the lack of attention paid to gender in most public policy to date. While some specific policies on gender may be necessary, it is equally important that gender concerns are mainstreamed into all areas of policy making — be it labour policy, health care, or school curricula. At the same time, approaching gender issues in policy making requires a holistic view of human development processes — in other words, many issues cannot be tackled in one area alone, but require reinforcing policies in various sectors. For example, policy on domestic violence requires attention from the health sector, the justice sector, the law enforcement sector, and so on.

Specific recommendations for immediate action include:

- strengthening national machinery, including capacity building, establishment of an Interministerial Board on Gender Equality and the establishment of a National Advisory Board on Gender Equality (see above);
- enacting a comprehensive review of all public policy in Latvia from a gender perspective, thereafter submitting concrete proposals for necessary amendments, additions and follow-up actions (i.e. the development of workplans or concrete implementation plans);
- enacting a comprehensive review of all Latvian legislation from a gender perspective, thereafter submitting concrete proposals for necessary amendments or additions. Legislation should be enacted that not only *prohibits* gender discrimination, but that *actively promotes* gender equality and the advancement of women.
- initiating and sustaining a dialogue amongst all partners that examines root causes of gender disparities and uncovers the way in which many examples of inequalities are interconnected and reinforce one another. Such an understanding is necessary for holistic policy-making that is to have a sustainable impact.

III Challenging Stereotypes and the Unhelpful Maintenance of Gender Roles: One of the main obstacles to real gender equality in Latvia is the maintenance and even propagation of stereotypes about men and women, that serve to lock individuals into gender roles. This was noted as a hindrance in virtually every issue examined in this report. Unfortunately, this is also one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome, as it involves long-term change in societal attitudes that are historically and culturally imbedded. Nonetheless, a sustained effort must be made by all stakeholders — legislators, policy-makers, activists, academics, media, and the general public — to challenge gender stereotypes both in one’s everyday work and in one’s everyday relationships.

Specific recommendations include:

- increased training and sensitization to gender issues for the media. This should not only be directed at journalists, but at all people responsible for shaping the way in which the media reflect gender issues, including editors, producers, and corporate and public spokespeople;
- increased attention to the way teachers and other educators reflect gender in classrooms. While the new Ministry of Education and Science guidelines are a positive step (see 2.2), these need to be complemented by concrete plans for implementation;
- the creation of mentoring programmes for women entering certain professions (such as business, government, etc.) This will help to raise the confidence of women and to teach them skills and strategies from other women who have been in similar circumstances. At the same time, this will help break down stereotypes of what women can and can not do, and will provide a viable alternative to the “old boys network” that limits the opportunities of women.
- encouragement of male public figures and popular personalities to speak about their role as a father.

IV Strengthening the Family — but not at any cost: Another common theme is the connection of gender equality in Latvia to the need to strengthen families — enhancing mutual support amongst family members and in most cases, increasing the participation of fathers in the private sphere.

However, in articulating this goal, two important points should be borne in mind. The first is that families come in a variety of forms. Non-traditional types of families should not be discouraged or judged if they are providing a loving, stable and equitable environment for their members. Second, it is crucial to remember that “the family” has traditionally been a site that often conflicts with a wom-

an’s interests, freedom and safety. Socio-economic conditions of family life have been evidenced to work against the interests of women (i.e. poverty rates in female-headed households), while often robbing them of access to resources equal to those of their male counterparts. Furthermore, as part of the “private sphere”, the family tends to be isolated from the legal restrictions and protection mechanisms that pertain to the public sphere, be it in the workplace or on the streets. For this reason, women — in Latvia and around the world — are at far greater risk for physical, sexual and psychological abuse within the home, usually at the hands of their partners. Because of these limits placed upon women within the home, they are unable to equally participate in public life.

It is therefore absolutely crucial that attempts to “strengthen families” in Latvia, while necessary and welcome, must be approached from a perspective that demands gender equality within the home. Without such a perspective, “strengthened families” — families that are pressured to prevail at any cost — threaten to weaken society as a whole.

Specific recommendations for achieving this goal include:

- the issuance by the Government of a Statement of Commitment to Non-Violence, thus exhibiting political will on behalf of the Government to combat violence in society in all of its forms;
- the preparation of a National Strategy and Action Plan for combating gender-based violence in Latvia (or as a sub-strategy to the National Strategy on Gender Equality) and amendments to legislation so that gender-based violence is specifically recognized and addressed;
- amendments to policy and legislation regarding family and childcare benefits, so that either parent may be able to claim these;
- increased attention to the special needs of men and fathers in the provision of social services.

V Strengthening Partnerships: Another common theme that has emerged is the need for more cooperation between stakeholders and improving the quality and sustainability of partnerships. Most obviously this pertains to relations between government institutions and NGOs, although it is equally applicable to ties between research institutions and civil society, media and activists, international organizations and national organizations.

Specific recommendations include:

- the establishment of a National Advisory Board on Gender Issues (see above);

- implementation of new guidelines for the delegation of competencies by the government to NGOs, including plans for monitoring, evaluation and the dissemination of best practices and lessons learned;
- the articulation of priorities for international assistance within the National Strategy for Gender Equality, and the development of a framework in which such assistance can be implemented.
- commissioning an expert on gender issues to review and advise on major research publications (e.g. the **Latvia Human Development Report**; social policy reports; etc.) It is crucial that “gender” is not isolated as a “separate” issue, but also integrated into research and analysis of all important questions for human development. Particular areas where this needs more attention include: poverty, the labour market, minority issues and social integration. One way of achieving this could be through the establishment of an independent think tank and/or public policy institute in Latvia. A resident expert(s) on gender could work not only on integrating gender concerns into the institute’s work, but could also work in an advisory capacity for the government, private institutions or others.

VI Improving the Quality, Quantity and Accessibility of Information on Gender:

One of the major trends to appear in this report is the lack of available and comprehensive information in many of the discussed areas. In order for reliable situational analyses to be completed and for effective policy and legislation to be developed, it is vital that the amount, quality and accessibility of information on gender issues be improved. This refers not only to specific research on gender, but also to the integration of gender perspectives into all research projects.

Specific recommendations could include:

- the articulation (most likely within the context of the National Strategy on Gender Equality) of research priorities for the Government. This should be followed up by a workplan for the implementation of this research, bearing in mind the need for regular follow-up research for comparative purposes.