

## Women's Rights

**Submitted by:** Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia and The Advocates for Human Rights

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**Summary:** Latvia faces significant challenges in protecting the rights of women, including those from marginalized groups such as Roma women and women with disabilities. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains widespread, while persistent stereotypes and inadequate public awareness hinder access to justice and support services. Roma women and girls face compounded discrimination due to both ethnicity and gender, with limited inclusion in policies, programs, and data collection. Women with disabilities experience heightened risks of violence and barriers to reporting, including inaccessible services and lack of specialized support. Access to timely breast cancer screening and care is insufficient, with low participation rates, fragmented services, and inadequate public education.

## Latvia does not have sufficient legal and institutional frameworks that limit effective prevention of Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls (GBVAW)

- Institutional capacity is critically low: the Ministry of Welfare has very few staff responsible for gender equality, and funding for gender policies remains insufficient, service provision is fragmented and inconsistent, and uneven police training leads to unequal protection and responses to victims across the country.
- Intersectionality within states responses is almost entirely absent, and the lack of gender- and ethnicity-disaggregated data hinders more effective action for women facing multiple forms of discrimination.
- Harmful gender stereotypes persist in policymaking and public attitudes, as anti-gender actors seek to withdraw Latvia from the Istanbul Convention, signalling efforts to dismantle existing protections for women, while the State lacks sustained public education to challenge them.
- Many consider DV as a private matter, which discourages many GBV victim-survivors from reporting abuse.

## The government fails to guarantee the rights of marginalized women and girls.

- Key ministries are not systematically engaged with Roma communities or disability advocacy groups, and limited funding, inadequate political will, and the absence of monitoring leave marginalized women at heightened risk of exploitation, abuse, and neglect.
- Roma women and women with disabilities face multiple marginalization, yet national policies largely ignore their specific needs. Roma women report violence at lower rates due to increased barriers to justice due to social marginalization, scarce local services, and financial constraints, while women with disabilities face higher risks of violence and systemic barriers, including inaccessible crisis services, lack of interpreters or alternative communication modes, long distances to shelters, and uneven municipal capacity.

- Latvia collects no disability- or gender-disaggregated data on Roma women or women with disabilities, preventing targeted action or accurate monitoring of violence and access to services.

### Latvia fails to provide timely breast cancer detection and care for women.

- Breast cancer is the most diagnosed cancer among Latvian women, with approximately 1,100 new cases annually and mortality rates above the EU average.
- Latvia's national screening program reaches only 38% of eligible women, far below the European goal of 70%. The program excludes women under 50, while public awareness campaigns are insufficient and many women skip screening due to lack of symptoms or understanding the importance of mammograms.
- Screening and care are fragmented and hampered by a lack of centralized databases, inconsistent quality assurance, uneven training of personnel, and rural access barriers including distances and limited transportation.
- State funding for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment is insufficient, leaving critical services like genetic testing and post-mastectomy reconstruction partially inaccessible. Lack of coordinated care and early detection contributes to late-stage diagnoses, higher treatment costs, and poorer outcomes compared with other EU countries.

### Recommendations

- Prioritize adequate resourcing in terms of personnel, ongoing public education campaigns, budgeting for gender equality and VAW policies and activities, with a focus on intersectionality such as disabilities and ethnicities.
- Strengthen the collection of disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, geographical location, disability and socioeconomic context in all spheres.
- Reject withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and conduct public awareness campaigns to combat gender stereotypes and misconceptions about the treaty.
- Ensure systems actors, including police, judges, and prosecutors, complete ongoing training on domestic violence and anti-discrimination led by or in consultation with NGO service providers. Police should be regularly trained on domestic violence and risk assessment, given their new authorities under the Law on Police.
- Modify the legal framework of the public work, education, and health system to ensure Roma women and girls fully enjoy their rights in this regard without discrimination, ensuring specific interventions focused on improving their access to employment, education, and health.
- Ensure policies and plans related to the Roma integrate a specific focus on Roma women and girls' rights, including a focus on gender-based violence and improving public awareness of those dynamics and the remedies available.
- Strengthen national policies and strategies on gender-based violence to explicitly address the intersection of gender and disability, recognizing women with disabilities as a distinct target group.
- Reform disability assessment and welfare procedures to remove bureaucratic barriers that prevent women with disabilities from accessing social protection and victim support in cases of violence.
- Establish a comprehensive national breast cancer screening registry, take measures to improve access to screening programs, train providers, implement follow-up systems, and run public awareness campaigns targeting women.