

# Gender inequality in europe: negative impacts on estonian women

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Throughout history, women have constantly struggled for equal rights. However, even after women have gained increased equality in many countries, gender inequality still exists on an international scale. The European country Estonia, in particular, faces a noticeably greater gap between men's and women's rights in comparison with its European neighbors. Despite the Estonian Gender Equality Law passed in 2004, sexism and gender stereotypes are still largely prevalent in Estonia's government and society. The problem of gender inequality has negatively impacted Estonian women in economic, social, and political aspects of life in Estonia. One major result of gender inequality is the limiting of economic opportunities for women. Because of traditional gender stereotypes, Estonian women are believed to be less valuable in the workplace than men. This form of sexism has heavily impacted the ability of women to obtain and maintain employment and salary: "in the 1990s women's unemployment exceeded that of men (38. 3% of women and 24. 7% of men)" (Erickson 278). In addition to the high unemployment rate for women, Estonia's pay gap (the difference between men and women's wages for the same job) is currently the highest in Europe: "women are paid over 30% less than men for the same profession" (Domsch 73). Since Estonian women are economically disadvantaged by unfair employment and salary, many women are forced to become economically dependent on their husbands or fathers. Overall, Estonia's large pay gap reflects its economic sexism and the detrimental effects of gender inequality on women. Gender inequality in Estonia has also led to social prejudice against women. Since Estonia's incorporation into the Soviet Union, gender roles have been deeply

established into Estonian society. These gender roles dictate what women are allowed to do and what small spheres of influence they have on economics, government, and politics. Gender roles have also inevitably led to sexism: " The relationship between men and women on a societal level represents relationship with unequal power distribution, where men dominate and women are subordinated or under-represented in most spheres of life. " (Morten para. 6). The social dominance of men stems from Estonia's incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940. During this period, Estonia's once Western attitudes and views on gender equality shifted to Soviet-centered beliefs, which emphasized the importance of submissive women who served men. Although the Soviet Union often used feminist propaganda to encourage women to work, women were frequently treated unfairly at home and in society. The gender roles established during the Soviet Union era continue to play a major role in Estonia's society today. Gender inequality is prevalent in both the household, where men are expected to exert dominance over their wives, and in social gatherings, where women's opinions are held in lower esteem (Domsch 148). In summary, gender inequality in Estonia has led to social discrimination against women. Another major result of gender inequality is the political prejudice that Estonian women face. After World War II, a period in which Estonia was politically and economically run by women due to a lack of men, the Communist Party reestablished men in the ruling bodies of Estonia. During this period, Estonian women were removed from politics and their political power was undermined. Very recently, some attempts have been made to solve the political gender inequality problem. In 2004, the

government passed the Gender Equality Act to ensure that women had equal political power and economic stability (Domsch 127). However, many of the rights guaranteed in the Gender Equality Act were pre-existent in the Constitution of Estonia. In practice, women have yet to see true equality in political or economic aspects. For example, a recent study showed that “roughly 8% of Estonian government positions are held by women, while only 20% of parliament members are women” (Morten para. 4). The small percentage of women in Estonia’s government directly reflects on the sexism in Estonian politics. Estonia’s male and female populations, though equal in size, are not equally politically represented, as shown by the clearly imbalanced gender ratio in their government. Overall, although small steps have been made toward gender equity, sexism and gender inequality are still widely extant, and have led to comparatively less political empowerment for Estonian women. Although women’s rights have been improved internationally, many countries still face challenges in establishing true gender equality. Estonia currently faces significant problems for women in many major aspects of society. Originating from Estonia’s incorporation into the Soviet Union after World War II, gender stereotypes have negatively affected Estonian women to this day. With one of the largest pay gaps between men and women in Europe, Estonia has a significantly imbalanced gender ratio for employment. Furthermore, sexism has also led to the diminished social and political power of women in Estonian society. Despite the recent improvements that have been made by the Estonian government in the past decade, the economic, social, and political opportunities of Estonian women are still severely limited by gender inequality.