

Statement by the Republic of Estonia,

Minster of Social Protection Ms Signe Riisalo

Honorable Mr President, Madam Executive Director, Excellencies,

I am very honored to be here today and speak on behalf of Estonia.

Firstly, I would like to commend UNICEF for their commitment and work, especially during this time of crisis. COVID-19 pandemic has hit countries across the world with unrelenting force, affected millions, especially children. All countries had to adapt quickly during the pandemic and proactively help people in need. For Estonia, as a member of the UN Security Council, the protection of children is of utmost importance. While the virus is especially dangerous for the elderly and people with certain chronic diseases, it is utterly important to acknowledge and support all vulnerable groups. That support includes vaccines. Current pandemic has demonstrated that we can overcome global challenges only through joint and coordinated action, COVAX being one example of it.

The measures taken to mitigate risks during COVID-19 have had significant consequences on the everyday lives of children. In Estonia, we have seen the following hidden impacts: increased mental health problems and domestic violence cases, strained relationships between family, growing stress and pressure, learning gaps. I think we all agree that children are the invisible victims of the COVID-19 pandemic and the real impacts of it are still to be seen.

Regardless of any crisis, the impacts on the child's and youth's well-being and rights must be assessed promptly in order to provide supportive services and help. For example, in Estonia our main principle in education for children with special educational needs throughout the pandemic has been to maintain contact-learning for as long as possible. Another main principle has been to ensure the continued availability of all essential services for children and other people with special needs.

Preparations for a crisis should take place before the crisis not during it. In case of Estonia, we can say that investments in digital services have paid off. Teachers, children and families were able to swiftly transition to distance-learning with the help of the state and NGOs. We encourage other countries to also increase their resilience by investing in digital services.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate our support to UNICEF and I am glad to announce that Estonian Government has decided to allocate additional contribution to help

UNICEF's activities in Ukraine and Syria in education, water and sanitary hygiene.

Thank you!