

First Ministerial roundtable:

Ensuring Access to Long-term Care and Support for Carers and Families

The Chair of the 1st roundtable (Ms. Signe RIISALO, Minister of Social Protection of Estonia)

Thank you, Madame Chair

Dear Executive Secretary, Ministers, Heads of Delegations, ladies, and gentlemen

Before we get to the discussion, **I feel it necessary to say that Estonia condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and urges the entire international community to do so. Russia's brutal war and unprovoked attacks, including systemic violence and atrocities against the civilian population, are terrifying and unacceptable. We ask all countries to show solidarity with Ukraine and stand up against the war.**

- It is my honour and privilege to chair today's high-level roundtable on ensuring access to long-term care and support for carers and families.
- Long-term care affects almost every one of us - whether it is caring for a family member now or will we ourselves need support in the future.
- It is in our hands to make long-term care accessible and of high-quality for every person in need. Listening to each other ideas and learning from each other practices, as we do today at this round table, is a very good way to get input for our policy making.
- Today we have a high-level discussion about the possibilities to improve the situation of persons in need for care and their caregivers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Please allow me to start this roundtable with insights to some challenges we face today.
- Our populations are decreasing and ageing - the trends that indeed have impact on long-term care systems. Many older people live healthy lives and contribute actively to their communities. However, we know that **the need for long-term care increases with age** and is especially prevalent among the very old.
- Although our long-term care systems are different, the **challenges are similar**. We are looking for ways of providing **affordable and adequate access** to long-term care for all in need and providing **services of good quality**.
- Our efforts are towards ensuring **professional long-term care workforce** with good working conditions and **supporting informal carers**. And finding the **most sustainable financing models** in times of shrinking working-age population and rising demand for care.
- The **COVID-19 pandemic** has put long-term care even higher on the political agenda.
- While developing long-term care policies, our genuine goal must be to enable people to **live dignified and independent life** in their homes for as long as possible. Everybody must be ensured to receive accessible support that improves or maintains their quality of life.
- Investing in the **prevention of care needs**, providing integrated health and social services, and using smart solutions and innovative technologies are important here.
- Placement to care home **must remain absolutely last resort** when all other measures have not been sufficient to meet the care needs.

- In Estonia, we have set the aim to develop **community support services for older people** who are no longer doing well in their homes, but whose need for assistance is not as great as the care home provides.
- People with more complex care needs should also be under our attention. For example, **people with dementia**. There is little public awareness about dementia. Appropriate services are often missing for both people with dementia and their family members.
- In Estonia, the **Dementia Competence Center** provides tools and trainings for professionals. The Center also organizes support groups and counselling for family members and raises general knowledge about dementia.
- **The role of family carers** can be physically and mentally challenging. It holds significant costs in the forms of lost earnings, careers, and pension entitlements.
- Without adequate support, informal carers may be **excluded from the labour market, may have poor health, and have higher risk of poverty and social isolation**. We must also bear in mind that caregiving has a strong gender dimension as it is predominantly provided by female family members.
- In recent years, several countries have made advances in **legally recognizing the activities of informal carers and providing targeted support**. In Estonia, for example, this year we introduced the definition of long-term care for the first time in law. This gives us legal clarity and more coherent basis to identify the need for support for people with care burden.
- Currently we are preparing legislative amendments to expand the circle of caregivers for whom social tax will be paid to give them better social guarantees like health and pension insurance. We will also expand caregivers' opportunities to take additional leave from work.

- Paying for long-term care, especially for institutional care, **is expensive for persons and their families**. It may put people with lower incomes into poverty risk.
- There is a **need for changes in the financing models**. We are looking for the ways to reduce the person's own contribution and involve more public finances. Public expenditure on long-term care is projected to rise more quickly than in other social policy areas. These developments underline the need to **ensure fiscally sustainable foundations** for long-term care systems, so that they could meet people's needs today and in the future.
- There were some challenges ahead of us. I believe that common discussions help us to come up with smart and sustainable solutions.