

Statement by Riia Salsa, Deputy Permanent Representative of Estonia to the UN in Geneva at the first formal session on Human rights of all migrants, social inclusion, cohesion, and all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia, and intolerance for the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Geneva 8-9 May 2017)

Panel 2: Social inclusion and cohesion

Thank you, Mr. Moderator and all panelists for their insightful thoughts.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the European Union.

Estonia pays a lot of importance to ensuring migrants' access to basic services on the same ground as other persons legally residing in the country. Our national legislation is in line with this principle and provides migrants equal access to basic services such as education, health care, justice and language training. Moreover, basic services offered in Estonia are also child, gender and disability responsive.

Allow me to highlight some of Estonia's best practices, as we strongly believe that rapid social and economic inclusion is key to successful integration and prevention of irregular stay of migrants.

Firstly, beneficiaries of international protection are entitled to the same compensations as other permanent residents of Estonia. They have the right to receive family benefits, labour market services and unemployment benefits, social benefits, health care services, psychological counselling and other assistance on the same grounds as all permanent residents of Estonia.

Secondly, education is the cornerstone of Estonia's approach towards migrant children. We are convinced that ensuring migrant children's access to education is our best investment in their future. Education limits the risk of alienation and disaffection. Therefore, local governments in Estonia ensure immediate inclusion of all migrant and refugee children to the national education system upon their arrival to Estonia. This means that all children, from the age of 1.5 to 17, are either in kindergarten, elementary or primary school, closest to their place of residence.

To ensure the protection of the rights of all migrants, their equal access to basic services social inclusion and integration, States have to ensure also efficient internal cooperation and regular dialogue between various State institutions. In this respect, Estonia established in 2015 a devoted migration coordination body that comprises senior representatives from various line ministries and other State institutions. This practice has proved useful.

Moreover, our experience shows that honest, fast and straightforward communication and cooperation between State authorities, NGO-s and local municipalities is the key factor in ensuring the successful provision of services and in protecting the rights of all beneficiaries of international protection.

Finally, we believe that mutual understanding and respect between legally residing migrants and receiving societies is the best and quickest way forward to achieve social inclusion, cohesion and integration.

Thank you!