

Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania
Ms. Monika Navickiene

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests,

It is an honor and pleasure to be able to say some words on this so important occasion which is the launch of the Council of Europe's Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2022-2027. It reminds us that children as every human being in the world are entitled to enjoy the full range of human rights, covering civil, political, economic, social, and cultural areas.

This also reminds us that a lot still needs to be done to promote measures that will ensure equity, justice, and equal opportunities for children to reach their full potential. I do strongly believe that the strategy will be an important beacon for the Member States to put the rights of the child at the heart of the political agenda of each of our countries.

Alongside steps that have enhanced the protection of the human rights of children, today again we have witnessed numerous negative developments, such as the war against Ukraine where the most vulnerable (including children, families, the elderly, and those with disabilities) have suffered enormously.

More and more news come from cities of Ukraine, that makes us witness horrendous war crimes against children – they were not only deprived of carefree days that each child has the right to enjoy throughout childhood, not only taken away a chance to go to school, to play with their friends, to enjoy happy moments with their families but their lives were taken to soon due to the brutal tortures and inhuman suffering.

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I know each of our countries does a lot to help Ukrainian brothers and sisters fleeing their homes to get a safe place and be protected in this situation. However, seeing the recent developments, everyone understands – that we must do more.

We are obliged to do more, especially when it comes to protecting children as well as other vulnerable groups. Also because it is not enough for children to leave Ukraine to have their lives and the lives of their loved ones to be fully protected. Even when coming to other countries, children are still endangered by other threats such as trafficking in children, illegal adoption, and other forms of exploitation.

Therefore, we still need to stand tall, show our unity and our solidarity, and put all possible measures and resources in place to remove even the slightest danger from children's lives of their further exploitation and their suffering.

I do believe that the Council of Europe's Strategy on the Rights of the Child priority area "Children's rights in crisis and emergency situations" will require the most attention from us today, tomorrow, and in the near future.

In Lithuania, a lot of focus is put too on developing measures and strengthening efforts to ensure that children from the most vulnerable groups can enjoy fully all their rights as all other children.

We do introduce new services for children, e.g., for those with high-risk behavior and children with disabilities. Within the EU Child Guarantee, there will be more than 98 mln. Eur allocated for the services for children with disabilities and their families. Within our Family Policy Development Program we plan a number of different services for children and families, covering not only those in vulnerable situations but also those from favorable conditions, to promote preventive measures as well.

Children participation is another important area, and today I am happy to say that in Lithuania we did establish Children Council next to our State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service as an advisory

body when making decisions related to children. So our Action Plan for the Child Guarantee implementation will be consulted with Children Council too.

Thank you sincerely for the Council of Europe and all Members States for the unity and solidarity, in both bright days and dark minutes. We do see a new Strategy on the Rights of the Child as an important step further that reminds us all that children are not only our future, but they are our present too, and they need our decisions today too.