

Permanent Mission of Estonia
Geneva

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The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Estonia to the United Nations and Other International Organisations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and in response to the Latter's letter No GVA-0706-ENG from 11 November 2011, has the honour to forward the response of Estonia to the questions on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations and Other International Organisations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.

Geneva, 30 January 2012



Enclosure: 1 page

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
GENEVA

Response of Estonia to the questions on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation

To work on identifying challenges and obstacles to the full realization of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as protection gaps thereto, and to continue to identify good practices and enabling factors in this regard;

To pay particular attention to persons belonging to vulnerable and marginalized groups, including by respecting the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality

Which groups and individuals experience stigmatization and how are different groups and individuals affected?

Regarding drinking water, there are no groups in Estonia, that experience stigmatization. Our country does not make any exceptions regarding vulnerable and marginalized groups and also, the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality are respected. Estonia is guided by the legislation of the European Union and we have national legislation and regulation that is in accordance with the EU water policy. We are guided by the Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy and by the council directive 98/83/EC of 3 November 1998 on the quality of water intended for human consumption.

Estonia ratified the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes on 9th September 2003. According to Article 6 of the Protocol, Parties to the Protocol must set their national targets and target dates in order to ensure implementation of the Protocol. Estonia as a member of the European Union must implement the EU water policy. The aim and idea of the Protocol coincide a lot with the water policy in the EU. Estonian targets that are set, are based on EU directives and on Treaty of Accession to the European Union. In Estonia the responsibility for implementing Protocol on Water and Health is divided between the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Social Affairs, specifically the latter's subsidiary agency, the Health Board. The requirements of Council Directive 98/83/EU are promulgated in Estonian law in the Public Health Act, the Water Act, and regulations under them. The Public Health Act lays down basic requirements for health protection and the human environment, including the provision that drinking water must be safe with respect to human health and must meet quality requirements. Regulations of the Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister of the Environment detail the requirements for quality and control of drinking water. These include all the purposes, responsibilities and requirements prescribed in the drinking water directive.

Regarding wastewater, there are no groups in Estonia, that experience stigmatization. Our country does not make any exceptions regarding vulnerable and marginalized groups and also, the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality are respected. Estonia is guided by the EU legislation. As concerns the field of wastewater we are guided by the Directive 2000/60/EC of the European parliament and Council Directive 91/271/EEC of 21 May 1991 on urban wastewater treatment.

The requirements of the Council Directive 91/271/EEC are provided in the Estonian Water Act and Regulation of the Minister of the Environment No. 269 of 31 July 2001 "Requirements for discharging of effluent into bodies of water and soil."

The Water Act lays down basic requirements for water and environmental protection, including the provision that wastewater must be collected and cleaned before discharging. Regulation of the Minister of the Environment "Requirements for discharging of effluent into bodies of water and soil" sets detailed requirements for treatment quality and control of wastewater. These include in full all the objectives, responsibilities and requirements provided in the urban wastewater treatment directive.

In accordance with the Directive 91/271/EEC and the Water Act wastewater management is based on agglomerations. An agglomeration is an area where the population and/or economic activities are sufficiently concentrated for urban wastewater to be collected and conducted to an urban wastewater treatment plant or to a final discharge. Conditions for wastewater collection and treatment depend on the size of agglomeration.

In agglomerations of more than 2000 pe wastewater must be collected through public sewage systems. In areas where the construction of a sewer is not technically feasible or is too expensive the wastewater can be collected to leak-tight containers and transported to the wastewater treatment plant for the treatment. In agglomerations below 2000 pe it's allowed to use small-scale treatment plants.

Furthermore, drinking water supply and wastewater collection from clients (inhabitants and enterprises etc) is regulated by the Water Supply and Public Sewage Act. According to the Water Supply and Public Sewage Act water supply and wastewater collection service must be available within the service area. Moreover, water price for the service must be fair and can not be discriminative for different clients.

In 2010, 87% of total population had access to drinking water supply system, the remainder having private wells. Defining the availability of access to water, at least 20 litres per person per day from an "improved" source within 1 kilometre of the user's dwelling, then approximately 100 % of Estonian population has access to improved drinking water. For groups of people, who are unable to provide home and sanitation for themselves, we have public places, where they can access and consume drinking water without any charge.

In 2010, 80% of the total population were connected to the public sewage system. As of 1 January 2010 the total population of Estonia was 1,340,127.