Estonian VNR statement by CSO

Speaker: Elis Vollmer, CEESEN NGO

Civil society organisations from Estonia welcome the Government's third Voluntary National Review and acknowledge genuine progress: a narrowing gender pay gap, 42.2% renewable energy share, near-universal compliant drinking water, and a world-class digital governance system. At the same time, significant gaps remain that official reporting tends to understate.

On SDG 5, the pay gap of 13.2% remains one of the EU's highest, yet Estonia delays EU Pay Transparency Directive implementation, multi-annual funding for domestic violence shelters is not secured, and women in rural areas and older women bear a disproportionate share of energy and digital poverty.

On SDG 6, 17–18% of households remain unconnected to public water and sewerage networks, while the share of surface water bodies in good ecological status fell from 53% to 50% between 2020 and 2024. Agricultural run-off requires binding, not voluntary, intervention.

On SDG 7, rising household energy costs fall hardest on vulnerable groups. The just transition for Ida-Virumaa and the nuclear energy pathway both require genuine civil society participation, not technical consultation alone.

On SDG 9, digital competence rates have stagnated at 62.5% since 2019, and transport-sector greenhouse gas emissions are rising - the 2035 reduction target has been officially assessed as unachievable with current measures.

On SDG 11, regional disparities remain exceptional by OECD standards, road casualties increased in 2025, and the share of citizens using sustainable modes of transport declined to 35.8%.

On SDG 17, meaningful partnerships are essential. Yet civil society organizations, especially women-led, local service-providing, and rights-based organizations, still lack sustainable financing and a stronger role in national decision-making. Domestically, the dissolution of the Sustainable Development Commission in 2024 has removed the primary multi-stakeholder forum for SDG governance, and civil society organisations serving marginalised communities remain dependent on short-cycle project funding that undermines their long-term contribution.

Questions to the Government

1. What steps will the Government take to establish sustainable domestic financing mechanisms for civil society organizations, including women-led and local service-providing organizations, in order to strengthen democratic resilience, civic participation, and inclusive partnerships needed for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals?

2. Given the dissolution of the Sustainable Development Commission in October 2024, what new institutional mechanism will the Government establish to ensure structured, inclusive and adequately resourced participation of civil society – including organisations representing women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and rural communities – in the monitoring, reporting and updating of SDG implementation across all relevant sectoral plans?
3. Given the persistent gaps in disaggregated data, how will the Government strengthen the institutional framework for gender equality and the relevant line ministries to ensure coordinated collection, monitoring, and public reporting of data disaggregated by sex, age, disability, ethnicity, and geography across all SDGs?