



Human Rights Watch
Item 6 - Adoption of the UPR on Estonia
HRC32 – 23 June 2016

Thank you Mr. President,

Human Rights Watch welcomes the adoption of the outcome of the UPR on Estonia, which reflected many important recommendations to address new and long-standing human rights concerns.

We take note of Estonia's stated commitment to improving human rights protections and to bringing national law into compliance with the international human rights system. It is commendable that Estonia plans to adopt an action plan for employment, social protection, inclusion, gender equality and equal opportunities. We recommend that Estonia also prioritize addressing human rights protections for stateless people and ethnic minorities, and welcome that it accepted Norway's recommendation to "reduce statelessness and to facilitate access to citizenship for long-term residents."

In recent years the Estonian government took significant steps to reduce child statelessness. The January 2015 amendments to the Citizenship Law simplified naturalization requirements for people over 65 and children. However, more immediate reforms are needed to improve the situation for other categories of stateless persons.

Language requirements remain the most significant naturalization challenge, especially for the country's elderly Russian-speaking population. The relative costs of naturalization and the income requirements for citizenship also continue to disenfranchise poorer long-term residents and have contributed to statelessness among the Russian-speaking population. While language fees can be reimbursed by the state, they still require up-front costs and are reimbursed only upon passing the language test.

Stateless residents do not enjoy full political rights in the country. Stateless residents may not occupy a number of professions, among them posts in the national and local civil service, police, and customs, and they may not become prosecutors, judges, notaries, and the like. Their voting rights are also limited.

Human Rights Watch notes significant steps taken by the government to ensure equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people by passing the Co-Habitation Act in 2014, but its implementation has been regrettably slow. We are also concerned by reports that hate crimes against LGBT people do not reach the courts. In line with the recommendations made by Bulgaria, Slovenia and Canada during the UPR debate, the government should do more to protect LGBT people from homophobic and transphobic violence by explicitly including sexual orientation and gender identity as a crime motive in hate crime legislation.

Human Rights Watch urges the government of Estonia to demonstrate its serious engagement with the UPR by implementing the explicit recommendations to address the afore-mentioned and other human rights concerns.

Thank you.