

Dear Audience, Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of Väestöliitto, the Family Federation of Finland I have the great pleasure of welcoming you all to this conference, *Shaping a Healthy Environment Fit for Children*. I am most delighted that so many distinguished participants and experts from Finland and across Europe and even from the United States have had the opportunity to attend this conference and we are honoured to host this event under the Finnish Presidency of the EU.

Väestöliitto is a non-governmental organisation in the field of social affairs, health and human rights. Our mission is to support the well-being of people and relationships. We dream of a world where all people feel well and everyone has a life-improving relationship. We provide services, act as an advocate and carry out population research. Through our activities Väestöliitto has acquired a thorough expertise in issues related to families, population and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

One of our main field of action is to promote children's and young people's balanced growth and good parenthood. These are also the topics of this conference today. Children' rights and well-being of children and families are a hot topic in Finland at the moment. Fertility rate has sunk rapidly during the recent years. According to Prime Minister Antti Rinne's Government Programme, ageing of the working-age population and a lower birth rate pose vast challenges for the Finnish labour market. The government wants to build a child-friendly Finland that is a good place to go to school, work and raise a family. President of Väestöliitto, Maria Kaisa Aula will present us the Child Strategy; this is a concept, which will be the key to a more child and family-friendly Finland.

We are proud to present you the ideas and network of one of our Member organisation, Sateenkaariperheet (Rainbow Families) during the networking hot spots. One hotspot gives insight on safe growth environment for rainbow children and it will be presented by NELFA, the European umbrella organisation for rainbow families associations. Sateenkaariperheet (the Rainbow Families of Finland) is a member of NELFA and Väestöliitto. Väestöliitto supports the families in all their diversity.

We are also pleased to present the Väestöliitto model of age-appropriate comprehensive sexual education for children in one of the Open Spaces of the conference. Our senior expert, Raisa Cacciatore, Doctor MD is a member of the

WHO European Expert Group on Sexuality Education. Through this she participated in the preparation for the WHO framework Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe. Respondent in this Open Space comes from International Planned Parenthood Federation European network. Väestöliitto is a member of COFACE (the European Families' network) and we also are a member of IPPF. The main objectives of our international activities is promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The extraordinary feature of Väestöliitto's work both in Finland and in European and global contexts is to combine: 1. sexual and reproductive health and rights issues, 2. the wellbeing of children, youth and parents and 3. the sustainable demographic change.

Once again I wish you all warmly welcome to this event and hope that we will have a productive and fruitful day, which will lead to further commitment and cooperation in the field of child well-being. I am looking forward to collecting many ideas from the discussions in the Open Spaces to feed into the Finnish Child strategy process, and also looking forward to building the first elements of a 2030 COFACE compass to build a Europe fit for children with the sustainable developments goals SDGs in mind.

Thank you.