

Speech by Mr Christer Hallerby, State Secretary for Integration and Gender Equality, EUKN Conference, Malmö 14 December 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Swedish EU Presidency I would like to thank the European Urban Knowledge Network for organising this conference. The theme of “young migrants in cities” is a pressing and important issue, for cities all over Europe, and it certainly is for our hosting city Malmö.

Today Europe faces several huge challenges. Migration and young migrants are at the same time part of the problems as part of the solutions. Our young migrants are a great asset for our societies, but an asset we do not always handle very well.

We now have to tackle the consequences after one of the worst global financial and economic crises ever. Unemployment rates – especially for young people – are increasing.

We have to manage integration better generally. Too many young migrants meet discrimination and exclusion in their new home countries.

At the same time we have a huge demographic challenge. Europe is ageing. According to a UN forecast, the proportion of the population in working-age will decrease by almost 10 percent until 2050.

It is obvious. Without labour migration and increased female participation in the labour force, Europe will be lagging behind in an increasingly fierce global competition. One key challenge is to realise the full potential of migration and to ensure effective integration policies.

In developing and implementing integration policies, we all have our shortcomings. No European country can claim to have found the perfect model. We all have to learn from each other and share experiences.

The present Swedish government has presented a holistic and comprehensive strategy as a base and a course for working with integration.

The strategy focuses on how to stimulate demand and supply in the labour market, how to ensure equivalence in schools and better conditions for entrepreneurs. Attention is given to discrimination, the need for common shared values and the situation of urban districts with widespread exclusion.

The strategy builds on the idea of mainstreaming. Integration policy should be a way to ensure that the activities of the government and public authorities reach out and have effect on the entire population, irrespective of ethnic background or place of birth.

A special focus is put on facilitating the reception and introduction of newly arrived immigrants during their first years in Sweden. Our previous experience, of too much of a "care-taking" approach, has resulted in an unnecessarily drawn out transitional period for individuals to find their feet into the Swedish society. Waiting two years from language acquisition to joining the labour market has been a devastating experience for more recent arrivals. The median time from a permanent residence permit to working life is as long as seven years.

We are now trying to shift our focus from treating immigrants as objects and passive welfare consumers to empowering individuals to take their own initiatives, make efforts and take responsibilities in order to be self-sustaining by way of employment or self-employment without unnecessary delay. It should be an integration policy that combines both incentives and demands.

The Government has recently presented a reform to help newly arrived immigrants enter more quickly into employment. The ambition is to speed up the process by strengthening personal incentives to find a job and to participate in employment preparation activities. Each newcomer should be given professional support to quickly learn Swedish, find a job and support himself or herself, and to become acquainted with the rights and obligations that apply in Sweden. A new law on the introduction of newly arrived immigrants will enter into force on 1 December 2010.

The support to new residents will require an active participation in introduction activities based on an individual plan. A new introduction benefit will be introduced and full allowance is conditioned with active participation and fulfilment of the plan. In a household both husband and wife has to participate, otherwise they lose half the allowance. A new actor is introduced – an 'introduction guide' – to support the newly arrived immigrant to carry out the activities according to the plan. It will be mandatory to take part in civic orientation courses.

In our integration efforts, special attention needs to be paid to the young. The likelihood for employment is lowest for the young with parents born in non-European countries. Employment gaps for low-skilled young people with non-European background persist over time, although the size of the difference decreases. Low-skilled young adults with non-European backgrounds also have significantly lower levels of income compared to those with other ethnic backgrounds or Swedish background.

There are also differences in educational performance, between students with different backgrounds. Students of foreign background have on average lower educational performances in compulsory school than students with Swedish background. Many students of foreign background leave compulsory school with incomplete grades and are overrepresented among pupils that do not meet the requirements for upper secondary school. These students however, are a very heterogeneous group. Their

individual backgrounds, circumstances and academic performance differ greatly from each other.

There are indications showing the impact of the neighbourhoods on educational performance. Schools in neighbourhoods that are densely populated by newly arrived students and low-skilled or unemployed parents tend to have an aggregated negative effect on poor educational achievements.

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs has recently presented a study of young people, who neither work nor study. They have focused on young people living in urban areas with a high proportion of immigrant population.

The presence of authorities and activities in those city districts is crucial. People with special competence and knowledge about the local circumstances are needed. And measures need to be taken at an early stage. Incentives and efforts to motivate is particularly important for those who are the furthest away from the labour market. Several alternatives to traditional school education are needed.

Some success factors have been identified. These include a careful mapping of the experiences and competences of the young. A holistic view of the individual's situation, as regards housing, health, daily routines, family situation and previous contacts with authorities is crucial. A certain level of flexibility and adaptability of measures is also important, as is the young persons' own participation, which should be a priority. A close cooperation between the local employers and the municipality as well as different methods to match job opportunities with the young persons' capabilities are also vital components.

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is also responsible for monitoring the development and implementation of the national youth policy. In its fifth annual report – *Fokus 09* – it has compared measures taken in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK to increase the level of employment, education and participation among young people.

Conclusions show that a large part of the work to combat young people's exclusion is carried out at the local level in all the four countries. The level of central government involvement differs. Concrete activities and methods in the areas of employment, education and participation have great similarities. For example, coaching and mentoring are common features in the efforts to facilitate young people's access to employment or education. All countries focus on preventing school dropout, and payment of social benefits requires some kind of professional or educational activity.

Differences exist in terms of methods to identify and monitor young people at risk of exclusion. The level of cooperation between actors concerned and the level of flexibility in educational systems differ greatly. The connection

between schools and the labour market is stronger in some countries than others.

Both these reports show the need of continued exchange of experience and knowledge. The integration policies of EU Member States can be supported and reinforced through this exchange, even if shaping the policies remains the responsibility of Member States. We therefore need to continue to improve the structures and tools for knowledge exchange.

The Lisbon Treaty has recently entered into force, giving a reinforced basis for EU cooperation in the field of integration. The new programme for freedom, security and justice – the Stockholm Programme – has just been agreed. It will be an important basis for further development of the EU cooperation concerning integration. Hopefully this collaboration will contribute to more effective integration policies in the Member States.

The Swedish EU Presidency has been engaged in the process to identify comparable core indicators for monitoring the outcome of integration policies. Indicators have been identified in a limited number of relevant policy areas: employment, education, social inclusion and active citizenship. The aim is to increase the comparability of national experiences and reinforce the European knowledge base.

The outcome of this process will be presented at the Presidency expert meeting organised here in Malmö following this EUKN conference. The theme of the meeting is “Integration of New Arrivals – Incentives and Work in Focus”. The purpose of the conference is to deepen our knowledge regarding incentives and how they can help to speed up the entry into the labour market and into society for newly arrived immigrants.

Several aspects of the integration process will be addressed:

- employment,
- education and language learning,
- housing and neighbourhood, and
- social inclusion and cohesion.

Politicians, practitioners, researchers and stakeholders have been invited. We hope to achieve constructive and fruitful discussions, between participants representing different parts of Europe and different sectors of society, which can increase our knowledge on successful measures to support the integration process.

Integration is a dynamic process of mutual interaction, requiring efforts not only by governments and EU institutions. Actors at all levels, including local actors, civil society, migrants themselves and the host community, must contribute to the integration process.

Ladies and gentlemen

We all have to manage integration better. It is necessary for stability and competitiveness of our countries and of the European Union. We have to learn from each other, but also to develop our competence and to develop new policies.

In that process, the EUKN plays a crucial role. And hopefully we can now, with the Lisbon treaty, also develop the cooperation further within the European Union.

Thank You