

**Statement by Mr. Tobias Billström, Minister of Migration  
Commission on Population and Development, 46th session**

**Statement regarding agenda item 4, general debate “National experience in population matters: new trends in migration: demographic aspects”**

Dear Chairperson,

Economic and demographic disparities are important drivers for migration. While Sweden, as well as many other EU member states, has an aging population and a shrinking workforce, there are countries with large groups of young and unemployed. For many men, women and families, migration constitutes an opportunity to escape poverty and economic marginalization, pursue their aspirations and improve their possibilities. It is my firm belief that legal and orderly migration can contribute to development for the individual as well as for communities, countries of origin and countries of destination. A discussion on the link between migration and demographic changes is timely and important, and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share experiences in this area.

The Swedish population is aging. Over the coming years we will be facing a situation where a large group of people are retiring, leaving an increasing number of gaps to fill on the labour market. Although migration alone cannot solve the problems of an aging population, migration can be one of several instruments needed to prevent labour shortages and maintain well-being and quality of life.

In 2008, new rules for labour immigration to Sweden entered into force and Sweden now has one of the most flexible and efficient systems for labour migration in the world. Our reform is designed to create a demand-driven, effective and flexible system which will make it easier for people to come to Sweden to work, and for Swedish companies to recruit labour from outside the European Economic Area, EEA. Our system recognizes that we need workers of all skill levels and in many different branches and sectors. The reform is therefore designed to allow workers of all skill levels to migrate to Sweden under one general framework.

The main driving-force for the Swedish reform was the recognition that there are labour shortages in Sweden that will not be filled solely by people living in Sweden or in other EEA countries. The demographic situation in Sweden will pose a serious challenge to the sustainability of our welfare systems, and in order to successfully address these challenges, a forward-looking and broad political strategy is required. Employers often have difficulties in finding workers with the right skills. By filling these shortages, migrants contribute to the overall growth of the Swedish economy as well as to the global economy. In this regard, labour immigration is part of Sweden's strategy for overall economic development, both in an immediate and long term perspective.

It is also important to remember that the challenges I just mentioned facing Sweden are as demanding for the entire European Union. Although we are currently facing high rates of unemployment in Europe, it is important to underline that this does not necessarily exclude labour

shortages from occurring in some occupations or sectors. The challenge is the matching of employers demand and workers with that particular skill. Facilitating growth of the European labour force by opening up for legal migration from third countries is essential in order to ensure that our labour markets remain diverse and vibrant. It is also crucial for achieving the targets set out in the EU's growth strategy EU 2020. In a not too distant future, the global competition to attract labour migrants will also be reinforced by the demographic changes in many other parts of the world, where life expectancy is increasing and the number of children per family is decreasing.

As I mentioned initially, while recognising that there are gaps to fill in the Swedish labour market, the Swedish government is also convinced that if properly managed, migration and mobility has the potential of contributing to development in the local communities and countries of origin as well.

Migration has been, and continues to be, a key driver of human progress and development. Migrants are crucial actors for development through the remittances they send home, for promoting trade and investment between countries of destination and countries of origin, and through the skills and ideas that they bring to the countries they come to, whether a country of destination or on return to their countries of origin. In this context, let me underscore that respect for the fundamental human rights of migrants, including protection against exploitation, discrimination and abuse, is essential to reap the full benefits of migration.

The acknowledgement of the link between migration and development is an important factor in Sweden's to engagement in the Global Forum on Migration and Development. As you know, Sweden assumed the Chairmanship of the GFMD in January this year and will continue as such until the end of June 2014. As we see it, our Chairmanship of the GFMD places a special responsibility on us to promote policy coherence within these two policy areas. This is also an overarching theme for our Chairmanship. We have the ambition to strengthen the development focus of the GFMD during our Chairmanship. To this effect, we promote mainstreaming of migration in development planning, including the integration of migration in the post 2015 development agenda.

The demographic patterns of our world are rapidly changing, and so are the patterns of migration. One example is that women are increasingly migrating on their own or as head of households. The process of globalization, with reduced travel and communication costs and an increasingly globalized labour market, has made temporary and circular migration an attractive and common option for international migrants, not least for those women and men who for various reasons migrate without their families. The traditional perception that migration involves moving from one place to another, where the migrant intends to stay permanently, has proven to be increasingly inadequate to describe the migration patterns of our time. At the same time, it has been apparent that many migrants want to remain active in the development of their countries of origin and that migrants can contribute with new skills and knowledge, increased trade flows and investments. Therefore, enabling

legal frameworks that facilitate mobility are important and a key to stay attractive in the competition of global talent. Such policies must be rights-based and gender-sensitive and build on high-quality data in order to facilitate the contribution to development and to increase the opportunities of the men, women and young people who migrate.

In Sweden, an independent Parliamentary Committee on Circular Migration and Development has examined the link between circular migration and development, with the task to identify factors that influence migrants' opportunities to circulate. The Committee has made a number of proposals for legislative changes as well as other recommendations. The proposals are currently being reviewed within the Government Offices and my plan is to present a government bill to the Parliament in the not so distant future.

It is my conviction, that by making it possible for men, women and young people to migrate and to move back-and-forth between countries of origin and destination, we will allow them to improve their possibilities and reach their potential. When we provide individuals with opportunities to migrate, when we recognise and make use of their skills and when we facilitate their contribution to development in both countries of destination and countries of origin – then we can truly achieve a situation that is beneficial for all involved.

Thank you!