



High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development,  
Roundtable 4: *International and Regional Labour Mobility and its Impact on  
Development*

Keynote speech – Tobias Billström, Minister for Migration and Asylum  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by thanking the governments of Bangladesh and the Russian Federation for the possibility to address this Roundtable.

In many parts of the world we have seen a global economic crisis with slowing global growth, rising unemployment, and looming uncertainty. Migrants have often been designated scapegoats. We should, however, not view global migration as part of the problem, but rather as part of the solution. Migration and mobility can indeed bring prosperity.

As the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, stated some time ago, "Human mobility makes our economies more efficient, even when they are not growing, by making sure that the right skills can reach the right places at the right time."

This is indeed a key starting point. For many countries, economies and societies, it is of major importance to improve the portability of skills, to achieve a better matching of migrants with labour market demands, and to reduce the recruitment costs. If we fail to deliver on any of these points, we will not achieve the full potential

benefits that migrants can bring to both countries of origin and countries of destination. This is something I believe should be a part of the discussions preparing for the post-2015 development agenda. The aspirations, hard work, skills and capacities of migrants can be transformed into real and concrete development outcomes. Policy-makers need to facilitate and unlock this potential contribution.

Sweden needs labour migrants. The Swedish population is aging, just as the populations of most European Union member states and many OECD countries. The growing numbers who are retiring, leave significant gaps in our labour market. Although migration alone cannot solve the challenges of an aging population, it can be one of several instruments to prevent labour shortages and maintain well-being and quality of life.

This is why Sweden reformed its labour immigration rules in 2008. Today, my country 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 Union. 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.

It is also important to remember that labour shortages may occur in parallel to high rates of unemployment, just as currently in Europe. The challenge is the matching of employers' demand and

workers with that particular skill. Our labour markets have a better chance of remaining diverse and vibrant if growth of the European labour force is facilitated through legal channels for migration from third countries. 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.

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, both through the remittances they send home, and through their role in promoting trade and investment between countries of destination and countries of origin. The skills and ideas they bring to the countries they come to also contribute to development, whether it is as migrants to 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.

Migration patterns of our world are rapidly changing. 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. 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, I am convinced that enabling legal frameworks that facilitate mobility are important, and a key factor 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. The demand driven and flexible nature of the Swedish labour migration rules is a first step towards a legal migration framework that encourages mobility and contributes to development in both countries of origin and in Sweden.

Moreover, as a step towards creating an even more flexible system, we have examined the link between circular migration and development. Just a few weeks ago, the Swedish government's Budget Bill included several commitments to strengthen the development effects of migration. Notably, we will assign the Swedish Consumer Agency to build a price comparison website for remittances to improve transparency and increase competition in the money transfer market. My government is also preparing legislative changes making it easier for migrants to move between Sweden and other countries and to remain active in the development of both places.

Looking now at the global level, I believe that my national experience is relevant for work that Sweden has been doing as the current Chair of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. We have highlighted the importance of portability

of migrant skills, better matching of migrants with labour market demands and reduced recruitment costs. Progress in these areas could improve the positive development impact of labour migration. It is a key aspect of why migration should be highlighted in the context of the post-2015 UN development agenda.

It is my conviction, that by making it possible for 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 full 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 for your attention, and I look forward to our discussion.