

**EUKN Conference *Cities of Opportunity – The urban promise of upward mobility*,
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Speech of Mr Christer Hallerby, State Secretary, Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, Sweden

Mr Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to speak at this conference in the European Urban Knowledge Network. Sweden became a full member of the network at the beginning of the year. In particular, it is a pleasure to speak about the great potential of our urban areas.

The future is urban. Urbanisation is one of the strongest global trends. People move to cities because cities are places where they can realise their aspirations. They move to cities to get access to jobs and develop their ideas, to experience culture and new living environments. They move to join families and friends, and sometimes to survive.

This global movement bringing people together in urban areas generates growth and development. Cities are places of economic growth and social cohesion. Cities are places of participation and partnership. Cities mean increased opportunities for a large part of the world's population.

As Richard Florida has demonstrated, the open attitude in cities attracts a diversity of people. And diversity generates creativity and growth. Diversity requires tolerance. Tolerance with the diverse backgrounds and ideas of newcomers. Tolerance is therefore, according to Florida, a competitive asset. Hence, effective integration policies and processes are of utmost importance in developing our European cities.

Integration of migrants is not only a social necessity; it is an important factor in developing cities' competitive strength. People with different cultural and social backgrounds should not only live side by side. The real challenge, that few – if any – succeed to meet, is turning diversity into a creative, dynamic situation. Newcomers should be stimulated to learn the language, get a job, find a home, and take part in society. And governments must take measures to tackle discrimination and xenophobia.

In a diverse, open and tolerant society, women participate on an equal level on the labour market as well as in society as a whole. Women are represented in decision making positions to the same extent as men – in politics, in companies and in the public sector. To face tomorrow's challenges, ensuring gender equality across the board and promote women's participation on the labour market is crucial. It is an obvious trend in Sweden today that women, more than men move to cities to realize carrier opportunities.

When ranking cities' competitive advantages and business climate, different research institutes and companies often point at number of headquarters, favourable tax systems, strong innovation capacity, good connectivity and accessibility, and attractive housing. I would like to see, instead, the ranking of the most integrated cities, the most gender equal cities, the cities free of discrimination and xenophobia. I think these cities, in the long run, would have the best chances to become the most competitive and attractive cities.

Urbanisation not only means opportunities. It also puts growing pressure on cities, on local labour markets, welfare systems, security schemes, housing and transport solutions. And not all citizens benefit from the opportunities urban development brings. Certain urban areas are heavily affected by exclusion and poverty. The employment level in these areas is generally lower than the national average, dependence on social benefits higher and school results inferior to average results of the country. The turnover of inhabitants in these areas is generally high. Governments must take a holistic approach to urban development, coping also with the challenges of urbanisation.

An overall objective of the Swedish government is to combat exclusion. One issue is of particular importance – participation on the labour market and the possibility to provide for yourself and your family. Every employed person is a big gain for the individual and for society. Special attention is given to those urban areas where the level of unemployment and exclusion is very high.

Sweden has about ten years experience of national urban policy. Cooperation between cities and the State level has been a consistent element. But the approach and instruments have changed over the years.

During the first years a large national budget was invested in projects in big city districts heavily affected by exclusion. Many of these projects were successful as such, but without a lasting impact. In reality, the number of individuals and areas affected by exclusion were not reduced. This ad-hoc project oriented approach failed to have a long term effect on the employment level, which is the fundamental factor for a positive development in these areas and cities as a whole.

Now, the approach is more of mainstreaming urban policy on the national level into other policy areas. The main focus is to create more job opportunities and get more people employable and employed. Besides, we also give priority to making schools better and places safe.

Under the umbrella of general policies we have established a framework for co-ordination and co-operation between state authorities, municipalities and private sector players as well as civil society.

The Government has recently offered 21 municipalities the opportunity to conclude local development agreements regarding 38 urban districts until 2010. For the first time, we offer long term conditions for the important urban development work. An important component in this co-operation is to monitor and evaluate the effects of general policies on the concerned districts.

Three government agencies have a special mission to adjust and develop their work based on the local situation in these municipalities: the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Social Insurance Agency and the National Police Board. The Government has approved an ordinance on urban development. It provides a framework for these agencies to shape their activities to meet local needs and actively participate in local partnerships. The local partnerships also give municipalities opportunities to become more effective in their use of resources from the European structural funds.

The environmental challenges of urbanisation are addressed in the government's policy for sustainable urban development. In this area, where new ideas and innovations are needed, we keep a project oriented approach. Large prebuilt housing estates from the sixties are in bad conditions. They require regeneration and sustainable energy solutions based on the latest environmental technology. The Government has set an agenda and allocated a budget for supporting the development of new, good examples of best practice. A special delegation for cooperation between the State, companies and municipalities has been set up to stimulate projects that contribute to better environment, reduced climate change, sustainable housing and increased quality of life.

Mr Chairman, in urban policy in Sweden as well as in our international co-operation the transfer of knowledge and sharing experiences are essential. Urban development work needs to build on research results, practices and skills from the whole international knowledge base. The European Urban Knowledge Network is a very welcome initiative in this respect and Sweden now benefits from and contributes to its potential.

This conference is an important occasion to discuss the challenges of an integrated approach to socioeconomic urban development. It will contribute to the implementation of the Leipzig Charter, currently in the framework of the French EU Presidency leading up to the informal ministerial meeting in Marseille later this autumn.

Sweden welcomes the ambitious approach taken by the French EU Presidency. We will continue, under the Swedish EU Presidency next year, the efforts to bring together European knowledge in support of this development. For example in a high level expert meeting, for which my Ministry is responsible, on incentives in the introduction of newcomers on the labour market. Sweden will also host a high level conference on sustainable urban development.

To realize the potential of urban areas, traditional growth and development strategies have to be supported by comprehensive integration strategies, the empowerment of individuals, effective introduction processes for newcomers' entry into employment. Firm action is needed to counteract discrimination and exclusion. Holistic strategies on urban development need to start with the individual's perspective. The overall political aim of equal rights, duties and opportunities for all women and men, regardless of ethnic and cultural background, is an important part of urban policy.

Thank you.