

Dear participants of the conference, ladies and gentlemen!

It is a pleasure to welcome you at the sixth Nordic-Baltic migration conference in Tallinn, KUMU. This series of conferences is a joint initiative and effort of the University of Tartu, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Ministry of the Interior of Estonia, the European Migration Network Contact Point in Tallinn and many other partners. This year we are arranging the conference together with the Migration Institute of Finland, the Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare, Nordregio, the Swedish Embassy in Tallinn. In preparing for the conference we have had a pleasure to work together with the Estonian Ministries for Social Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Education and Research, Economy and Infrastructure, several research institutes, NGOs, local governments and other good partners. We are very thankful to all these cooperation partners – without your collaboration and support these migration conferences would not have been as successful as we can see it today.

The Nordic countries have a lot of experiences with immigration. Since 1990 the population of the Nordic region has grown by 15 percent. Two thirds of the growth of the population is a result of immigration. Immigration to the Nordic countries has grown permanently during the last ten years, based on the widening of the EU and on the fact that a big part of refugees has made their way to Norden during the last years. All together 2, 9 million people have moved to live to the Nordic countries in the last decade.

According to the State of the Nordic Region 2018 report the Nordic Region is expected to have almost 30 million inhabitants by 2030, an increase of more than 10% from the current 26 million. The current demographic situation in the Nordic Region is characterised by four main trends: the Nordic population is growing, driven to a large extent by immigration, and is increasingly concentrated in urban settlements. The average age of the population is also increasing, while a growing share of people have a foreign background. All of these trends are expected to continue in the years to come.

Over the past ten years, the population of the Nordic Region has grown quicker but also aged faster as a whole than in many other European regions. This process does not however affect all Nordic regions and municipalities in equal measure. Nordic municipalities and regions experience very different, often contrasting, demographic trends, presenting specific opportunities and challenges to each: population growth is largely concentrated in the urban areas while many remote and sparsely populated areas face population decline and high rates of population ageing.

Around one in five people in the Nordic Region live in the five largest urban areas. Between 2011 and 2016, growth in urban settlements has been around 9% in Norway and Sweden, while Denmark, Finland and Iceland register around half that rate. Immigration accounts for a large part of this increase. Indeed, roughly 26% of all Nordic municipalities increased their population between 2011 and 2016 only due to international migration.

As of 2017, one in eight Nordic residents were identified as having been born abroad, either in another Nordic country or outside the Nordic Region. Rural municipalities are increasingly recognising the important contribution that immigrants can make to their communities. Most migrants however still choose to live in the large urban settlements. As such, questions relating to how the integration of refugees and other newcomers can best be facilitated have gained increasing importance in the aftermath of the European 'refugee crisis' and will undoubtedly remain of central concern in the years to come.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has initiated a collaboration programme for effective integration and inclusion of refugees and immigrants in the Nordic countries in June 2016. This decision was made as a response to the increasing numbers of asylum seekers to the countries in 2015, which posed certain challenges to the welfare systems – but also implied a clear potential to our ageing societies – especially in the more sparsely populated parts of the Nordics. The goal of this NCM's programme is to increase the efficiency of Nordic integration practices, this programme is designed to support the national efforts on integration of refugees and immigrants.

The aim of the project is to serve as an idea bank on the integration area, to map out existing knowledge and research, and to expand our common knowledge base on integration. The Nordic Welfare Centre in close collaboration with Nordregio has the overall responsibility for the main project "Nordic collaboration on integration of refugees and migrants". The project has become a hub for capacity building and networking between key actors working hands-on with the inclusion of newcomers into the Nordic labour markets and communities. The integration programme will continue through 2018, including the assignment for Nordic Welfare Centre and Nordregio, in close collaboration with the Nordic Council of Ministers. The main themes will be:

- The potential of immigration in shrinking communities – how to make newcomers stay?
- Faster integration into Nordic labour markets – competence building and matchmaking
- Segregated cities – housing and planning for more inclusive urban areas
- Kids and young adults in the integration process – the role of schools and social networks

The Nordic countries have a somewhat different approach to integration of immigrants, including labour market integration. But what is similar to the Nordic region as general, is that we all work for the solidarity in EU, supporting at the same time possibilities for return migration, and for better inclusion of newcomers to the labour market. The State of Nordic Region report on migration is being launched tomorrow in Stockholm, this will give a thorough look on the migration and integration policies of the Nordic region. It takes on average five to ten years for a refugee to find work in the Nordic countries. As social inclusion is closely linked to successful labour market integration, and as during this period the refugee represents a cost to society, the question of how to ensure access to the labour market has been a prominent issue on the political agenda.

Since the countries in the Nordic-Baltic region show both differences and similarities in their migration policies and practical solutions, the question is how we can learn from each other. Conferences, like we are having today in Tallinn, are one possibility to listen to and discuss upon the different experiences of the countries in our region. This is why the NCM has supported the initiative of the NCM's Office in Estonia to arrange several activities, today's conference being one of these, on immigration and integration during 2018-2019 together with partners from Estonia and neighbouring countries. Please let me say thank you to all the speakers of the conference, our cooperation partners and all participants of the conference. Wish you a very fruitful conference, new contacts, exchange of experiences and good discussions.