

The 'Migration and Demographic Challenges in the Nordic-Baltic Region' on 7 & 8 March 2013, KUMU Art Museum, Tallinn

Taavi Rõivas, Minister of Social Affairs of Estonia, Opening statements

- To begin with, I would like to welcome the Nordic Council of Ministers' initiative to hold this two-day conference on labour migration and demographic issues dedicated to our region and thank the organisers for this remarkable event.
- I am delighted that the programme covers a wide range of migration issues from various perspectives and brings together distinguished experts and policy makers from the region.
- For Estonia the Nordic countries are important partners in terms of labour migration. Today, many Estonians work in Finland, but also Sweden and Norway. Nordic countries are amongst the most popular destinations, preferred by 60% of those Estonians who want to work abroad.
- We are also most interested in sharing experiences with our Baltic neighbours who are in similar position with us. Therefore today's discussions and further cooperation in this field are highly valuable.
- Supply of qualified labour and mismatch between labour supply and demand is a common problem for many countries, including Estonia. Migration can form an important part of a wider policy mix to solve the problems connected to labour and skill shortages. But there are different aspects to be considered if we want to maximise the benefits and minimise the possible negative effects of labour migration both for sending and receiving countries.
- Firstly, measures are needed to ensure that moving to another country for work is safe. It is important to make information about job opportunities available across Europe. Mobile workers should have easy access to information about their rights and obligations related to working abroad. It is equally important to inform job-seekers about possible risks that may be involved.
- Secondly, it is important to have an adequate overview of migration flows and labour mobility in order to enable appropriate policy making and avoid problems such as misuse of social benefits. A very positive example here is data-exchange agreement between Population Registers of Estonia and Finland. There is definitely room for further cooperation in this field.
- Finally, balanced migration developments should be sought after. It is no secret that one of Estonia's main challenges today is our decreasing population. It is also obvious that relatively high outward migration is contributing to this trend. This is not to say that we see people going to work abroad only as a problem. The question we are asking today is: how to encourage people who work abroad to

return home. Thanks to the knowledge and skills obtained abroad they could be of great value for Estonian labour market.