

## **Statement by Emilia Bjuggren, vice Mayor of Stockholm**

Dear audience,

First of all I would like to take this opportunity to thank the IOM for welcoming me to their conference on migrants and cities. The issues raised here are pertinent as the UNHCR records the highest number of forcibly displaced people in modern human history. Thus it is impossible to speak of migrants and cities without discussing the refugee situation.

By the end of this year almost 150 000 people will have sought asylum in Sweden. This equals the size of the fifth largest city in Sweden. And every day, 80 unaccompanied children fleeing war, conflict and persecution arrive in the city of Stockholm.

Receiving refugees is our humanitarian and moral obligation. However, it is crucial to understand that, rightly managed; receiving refugees is also an investment in the economic and democratic development of our city.

Migrants enrich our local community. Whether they are students moving in from the northern part of Sweden or refugees from Syria, they bring diversity and new approaches and solutions to old problems. Stockholm is growing, and we are completely dependent on the influx of new people and new skills for our economy to continue thriving. Today, three out of four local business owners state that skilled labour shortage is a main obstacle to their growth. The key is to allow every individual arriving to Stockholm a fast entrance into our society by providing access to jobs, education and housing.

The current refugee situation pinpoints the importance of effective linkages between different levels of government. All actors have to come together to ensure both a swift short-term humanitarian response to the crisis, as well as the long-term planning for allowing people full participation in society. Providing shelter is one thing, but how do we provide a new home?

Today, refugees arriving in Sweden are the responsibility of the central government, via the Swedish migration board and the Public Employment Service, for the two initial years in the country, whilst

local governments are charged with providing housing and Swedish language education. The system is based on sequential planning, where refugees move from central government support services to local government support services in a chronological order.

I believe that we have to move towards a system of dialogue and parallel planning, with individual support services based on each individual's unique strengths and needs. Some people arriving to Sweden will have to go through both Swedish training and vocational education to get a job, whilst other might just need their previous qualifications validated or an internship to get a foothold in the labour market. Therefore, our migration management system has to be much more flexible and attuned to each individual's situation.

Central and local authorities are key actors in migration management, but involving civil society and the business sector is equally important. The Swedish Prime Minister recently launched "Sweden together", a forum for dialogue with all actors, including civil society, involved in refugee and migration management. The dialogue is held at a national, regional and local level, and aims at creating awareness, understanding and consensus on the issues at hand, as well as sharing best practices and developing innovative solutions for effective and inclusive migration management. At the end of the day, it is local business owners who will employ the new Stockholmers, and it is local civil society organisations as well as religious groups and sports teams who will welcome the new Stockholmers into our community.

Dialogue is essential to prevent political tension and social unrest following migration. Over the last couple of weeks Stockholmers have come out in large numbers to show their support for refugees, but we are also risking a backlash as people are increasingly worried that our education, housing and social services systems won't be able to handle the large influx of people. The local authorities need to take these worries seriously. We have to be able to ensure people that our systems will manage. Stockholm is a rich city, and we have the capacity to do our part in tackling the global humanitarian crisis that is the refugee situation. We cannot solve the crisis alone, but we will do our share.

I believe that the root causes for people's worries are unemployment, poor school results and growing inequalities. Whilst nationalist and xenophobic groups point fingers and scapegoat migrants for society's problem, we need concrete political answers to people's worries and problems. Otherwise, people will turn to the nationalist groups.

I am proud to say that one of the first things we, in the political majority in Stockholm, did when we assumed office last year was to issue a Commission for a Socially Sustainable Stockholm. The “equality Commission”, as I like to call it, will work with these issues. Their mission is to analyse the rising inequalities between men and women, rich and poor, native and foreign born Stockholmers, and to suggest new and innovative methods for breaking inequalities and creating a socially sustainable and inclusive city. I would urge other cities to do the same. Ultimately, migration is not a problem, but poor migration management is a problem.