

THIRD SESSION

REPORT

Vision 2030: Migration and Integration: Finding Common Solutions Based on Mutual Information and Best Practices



Mr. Hans Wallmark

Chairman of the BSPC Working Group on Migration & Integration, Sweden

Dear President of the BSCP,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank Valerijus, the Lithuanian team and Bodo for all your efforts in preparing this conference. I am very glad that despite the corona pandemic - when nothing is as it used to be - the traditional discussion and debate with friends from around the Baltic Sea still takes place in the end of August – even if it is in a slightly different format this time.

The BSCP Working Group on Migration and Integration was launched by the 26th BSCP in Hamburg on 5 September 2017. For the past three years the Working Group has had engaging discussions, listened to a number of presentations from experts and exchanged best practice examples with each other.

During this time a scientific analysis has been conducted by the Migration Institute of Finland and the dialogue with the Governments on the subject has continued and been extended. We have finalized two interim reports, a final report and several recommendations to our governments. Our work has now come to an end.

The aim of the Working Group has been to coordinate and cooperate, to the extent possible, while respecting the fact that migration and integration are areas of national legal competence. Each and every member of the BSCP also has different national priorities, traditions, migration realities and conditions to further take into account when formulating our individual approaches.

This has been one of the strengths of the Working Group; by sharing best practices and our different perspectives on the topic, we have been able to learn from each other.

This is also one of the main conclusions stated in the final report - to continue to disseminate and share best practices regarding, for example support employment and integration of certain groups of migrants. We need to acknowledge the multifaceted character of integration, including the labour market, language, social relationships and cultural accommodation. In all of these areas can we, continue to learn from each other.

During the past years the Working Group has met with several actors working with migration and integration in the Baltic Sea Region, many of them parts of the civil society. Another recommendation of the Working Group is therefore, to acknowledge the importance of civil

society and NGO's in facilitating integration. Sports associations are one example of organisations that play an important, unifying role in integration by helping people to get introduced to the society, activated, and bringing new groups of people together.

Other recommendations of the Working group include striving for multinational cooperation and coordination in order to balance undesirable developments such as labour shortages and labour surpluses and to acknowledge the concept of three-way integration in legislation and policies.

Coming back to the aim of the Working Group, we also recommend the BSCP governments to – as best possible given the fact that we need to take the individual conditions into account - aspire to harmonize the practices concerning returns, processing of asylum applications, and reception standard facilities provided for minor asylum applicants, while taking into account both national and human's rights considerations.

The Working Group would also like to point to the importance of promoting good relations within society and to promote diversity.

Since the refugee crisis in 2015 and the shared – but various – challenges it created in our region, the issue of migration and integration has been one of the key political topics in almost all countries in the Baltic Sea Region.

Now we are dealing with another crisis – COVID-19. Due to the pandemic the last meeting of the Working Group, scheduled on the Åland Islands in April this year, had to be cancelled. The Working Group has therefore not been having the chance to discuss the effects of the pandemic in detail but has still been able to take the pandemic into consideration when discussing and issuing recommendations.

Being aware of a new reality due to the pandemic, the Working Group urges that the issue of migration and integration continues to be given high priority. We need to maintain and further develop, the institutions and projects that have been set up in many countries in the Baltic Sea Region as a result of the sharp increase in refugee numbers in 2015 and 2016 and which have made a decisive contribution to improved integration, in order to better respond to future needs in this area.

We also need to maintain and extend the support for local authorities in this task, because in the long term, they bear the main responsibility in the context of sustainable integration and implementation of long-term integration measures.

And once again, we need to continue to bring up and highlight successful examples of best practices in other Baltic Sea countries, provided that they can be integrated into the respective legal and structural framework. Because this is what we can do best - we learn from each other.

One person that I have learned a lot from during this Working Group is Carola Veit, the Vice Chair of the Working Group. Thank you, for your excellent work as Vice Chair, your dedication to the task of the Working Group and our fruitful cooperation.

I would also like to thank my fellow colleague Pyry Niemi, who has taken my seat in my absence.

Many thanks to the Parliaments that have shown great hospitality when hosting the meetings of the Working Group – Hamburg, Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein, Kaliningrad, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany and - even though we didn't make it this time – the Åland Islands. Thanks to all the experts attending the meetings, as well as the secretariats of the Parliaments and the Secretary-General, who have supported the work of the Group with the highest levels of commitment.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank all the members of the Working Group for your high-quality contributions, the intense discussions and the harmonious atmosphere. This Working Group has truly shown that the BSPC is an arena for engaging discussions and cooperation, even in an area that is rather politically sensitive in its nature.

This is the strength of the BSPC; that it is possible to have open arenas for dialogue despite differences of opinion between members.

I am very proud to have had the honour of being the Chair of this Working Group. Thank you very much for your attention and I wish you all a very successful conference!