

**SEMINAR ON THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS INTO THE LABOUR MARKET**

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**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

*BY*

*JOHN P. MARTIN*

*DIRECTOR FOR EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, OECD*

Minister Vieira da Silva, Mr. Mario Mesquita, Ambassador Ferro Rodrigues, High Commissioner Marques, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Portuguese authorities, in particular the ACIME (the High Commissioner Rui Marques, Ms. Catarina Reis Oliveira, Mr. Bernardo de Sousa and their team) for having invited us to Lisbon for this international seminar on the labour market integration of immigrants as well as for the annual meeting of the OECD Working Party on Migration which took place on 13 and 14 June. I would also like to thank the Luso-American Foundation for their generosity in hosting this event.

The labour market integration of immigrants is a topical issue in many OECD countries, including Portugal. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, increased resort to labour immigration is seen as one possible route to help fill labour shortages, particularly in the context of ageing populations. But, for this to be a feasible policy option, it is necessary that immigrants and their children, as well as future arrivals, be well “integrated” into OECD societies. Although integration into the labour market does not necessarily guarantee social integration, active participation in the labour market is probably the single most important factor for the successful integration of immigrants. It is also key for the acceptance of further immigration by the host-country population and for immigrants to fully participate in the host country’s society.

Secondly, the issue of integration has gained importance with the growing numbers of immigrants in OECD countries. Our “host country” for this event, Portugal, provides an excellent example of a country where immigration and therefore integration is a rather recent and emerging topic.

Finally, as has been shown by the country reviews carried out by the OECD, the labour market outcomes of immigrants and their children lag behind those of the native-born in many OECD countries, even after accounting for differences in socio-demographic characteristics. The fact that the integration process is not functioning as well today in many OECD countries as it did for past cohorts of immigrants and their children is very worrying.

The definition of “successful labour market integration of immigrants” which we have adopted for our on-going country reviews is one where immigrants and their children have labour force outcomes similar to those of native-born persons with the same qualifications and skills. Now this is a process which naturally takes time, and where some assistance by the host country may be needed.

The main objective of today’s seminar is to discuss findings on labour market integration related to an ongoing series of country reviews conducted by the OECD. Five countries have been reviewed thus far (Australia, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Belgium), and reviews on France and Portugal are currently under way. Further reviews on the Netherlands, Switzerland and possibly the United Kingdom are planned.

The findings of the reviews on the first four countries – Australia, Denmark, Germany and Sweden – have been put together in a new OECD publication entitled *Jobs for Immigrants*, which we are distributing to the participants at the occasion of this seminar. Please note that this document is confidential for the moment, but it will be released to the public in the coming week.

OECD countries have diverse migration histories and migration regimes, and this diversity is reflected in the labour market outcomes of immigrants and their children. Today's seminar provides an excellent opportunity to share experiences between OECD countries related to these issues, and to discuss and identify what works and what does not, and why. The sessions in today's seminar focus on three key sets of challenges related to labour market integration which all countries face in one way or another. Firstly, how best to assess the skills and qualification of immigrants and to ensure that they have the human capital needed to prosper in the host country's labour market. Secondly, how best to help immigrants and their children to get a foothold into the labour market. Finally, there is the contentious issue of how best to combat discrimination and to promote diversity. Following these sessions, the panel discussion will put forward some perspectives for integration policy.

Once again, a warm welcome to you all and I look forward to a very fruitful set of discussions.

**John P.Martin**

Director, OECD Directorate for Employment,  
Labour and Social Affairs