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English - Or. English

**DIRECTORATE FOR EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

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Session II: GETTING A Foothold INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

Issues for Discussion

**SEMINAR ON THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS INTO THE LABOUR MARKET
Lisbon (Flad), 15 June 2007**

English - Or. English

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SESSION II. GETTING A FOOTHOLD INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Experiences from many OECD countries have shown that immigrants have difficulties in entering the labour market, but that there tends to be relatively good wage progression once employed. In contrast to work experience gained in the origin country which tends to be almost entirely discounted, experience gained in the host country seems to be highly rewarded by employers. In addition, *early* labour market access seems to be a key determinant of labour market success also in the long term. But immigrants are at a structural disadvantage in seeking a first foothold in the host-country labour market, even when they speak the host country language and have a level of education that is “equivalent” to that of natives.

2. A first difficulty which immigrants face is related to job search. They tend to lack knowledge of the general functioning of the host country’s labour market, *i.e.* the job options available, the channels by which vacancies are filled, and the criteria by which employers select among similarly qualified applicants.

3. A second issue arises when immigrants seek to get into contact with potential employers. It appears that a significant share of vacancies in many countries is filled through personal contacts, of which immigrants tend to have less. Mere contact-building may not be sufficient when there is some uncertainty about immigrants’ skills and productivity. Where employers are risk-averse, this may even apply in cases where these skills have already been formally assessed. This raises the problem of transmitting knowledge of the skills and experience of immigrants to employers.

4. A group that has received growing policy attention in recent years is the children of immigrants. *A priori*, one would not expect any particular labour market integration problems for this group, because they have been raised and educated in the country. However, their parents have often been very low qualified. There is a general tendency for intergenerational transmission of human capital, and education systems have often failed to compensate sufficiently for this. The educational attainment of the native-born children of immigrants in many countries lags behind that of the children of natives. Even when they have the same education levels as the children of natives, the children of immigrants have more difficulties in finding employment, for reasons which may be similar to those affecting immigrants.

5. There is a broad variety of policy measures and programmes in place to tackle these issues. They are often of project-type nature and locally-based – but not often subject to evaluation.

Questions for discussion:

1. *What labour market measures are most appropriate in helping immigrants to get better access to jobs? Are immigrant-specific measures called for or are mainstream programmes sufficient?*
2. *How can effective initiatives arising from the local or regional level be identified and mainstreamed?*
3. *What measures could be used to address the employment difficulties of children of immigrants?*