Ageing populations oblige OECD countries to review their employment policies:
press conference in Brussels, Monday 10 October 10.30 a.m.

People are living longer and yet spending much longer in retirement, but what is a boon for individuals threatens to be a bane for economies and social welfare systems. Unless OECD countries adapt their employment policies to the new demographic realities, they will face shrinking workforces and declining prosperity.

Many current policies in OECD countries are relics of a past era that penalize, rather than reward, older workers for carrying on working. To help set an agenda for change, the OECD is organising a high-level policy forum on Ageing and Employment Policies at Palais d’Egmont in Brussels on 17-18 October to discuss new OECD analysis based on a review of policies in 20 OECD countries.

This new analysis will be presented at a press conference by OECD Deputy Secretary-General Berglind Ásgeirsdóttir and the OECD’s Deputy Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Martine Durand, at 10.30 a.m. on Monday 10 October 2005 at the IPC-Residence Palace 155, rue de la Loi, in Brussels.

On 17 October, the first day of the high-level policy forum, government officials, social partners, academics and representatives of civil society organisations will discuss the issues raised by the OECD analysis. Their objective will be to define a new set of age-friendly employment policies that will benefit the economy, society and older individuals themselves. The debate will be open to the media.

On 18 October, ministers and senior officials will meet in closed session to discuss the following issues:

- Is later retirement best promoted by penalising early retirement or by making work more attractive?
- How can entrenched attitudes of employers and employees towards early retirement be changed?
- Can best practices to promote the employability of older workers be identified?

A press conference will be held at 3.00 p.m. on Tuesday 18 October at Palais d’Egmont.

Over the next 50 years, all OECD countries will see a big increase in the share of elderly people in their populations and a sharp fall in the share of people of prime working-age. If work and retirement patterns do not change, there could be over 70 older inactive people for every 100 workers on average in OECD countries by 2050, almost double the current ratio of around 38 for every 100. In Europe, this ratio could rise to close to one older inactive person for every working person.
Currently, older workers face numerous employment barriers, and these often result in early exit from the labour market. Despite increases in longevity, the effective age at which workers retire has fallen in almost all OECD countries. In 2004, on average in OECD countries, fewer than six out of 10 people aged between 50 and 64 had a job.

The OECD recommends new age-friendly policies to offset the potential effects of population ageing on public budgets and economic growth while at the same time promoting choice for older workers. It urges governments and employers to seize the opportunities provided by improved health and greater longevity for the benefit of older workers and for society at large.

For further information and to register for the press conferences and/or to attend the 17 October session of the high-level forum, journalists are invited to contact the OECD’s Media Relations Division (+ 33 1 45 24 97 00 or news.contact@oecd.org). For comment on the policy issues, journalists are invited to contact Raymond Torres (+ 33 1 45 24 91 53 or raymond.torres@oecd.org) or Mark Keese (+ 33 1 45 24 87 94 or mark.keese@oecd.org)