

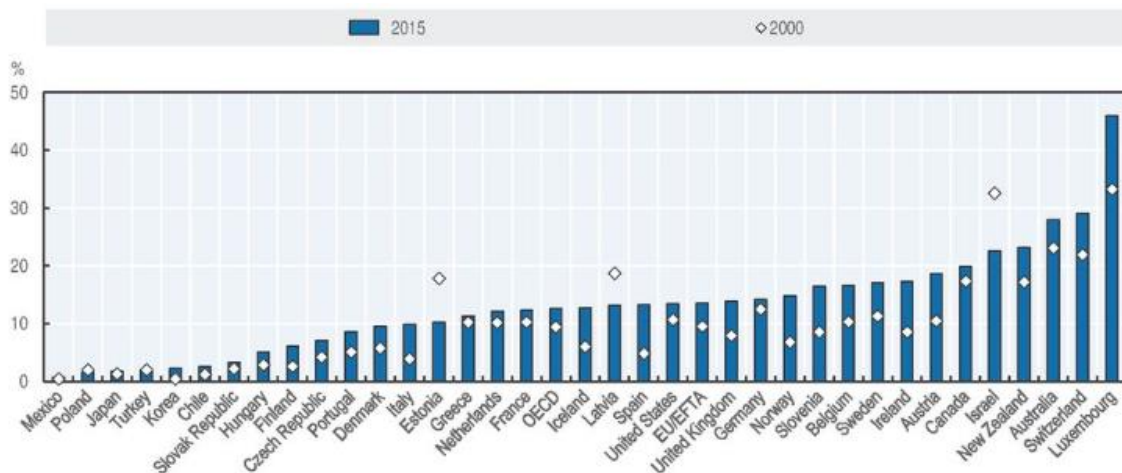
Issues note - Plenary I: The diversity challenge

OECD countries are becoming more diverse: the variety of groups defined by individual characteristics such as gender, age, disability, LGBT status, nationality, ethnicity, or race has increased considerably, in the labour market and in society more broadly. Women have entered the workforce in large numbers. Employment rates of older workers are increasing: 59% of individuals in the age group 55-64 are employed in 2016, up from 48% in 2000. Nearly 15% of the working-age population reports having a disability or long-lasting health problem that limits their activities in daily life. This share rises with age, with rates twice as high among those aged 50 to 64. Increasingly, LGBT people are open about their sexual orientation and gender identity. As an illustration, successive rounds of a Gallup survey in the US reveal that the proportion of adults who identify as LGBT is rapidly increasing: 3.5% in 2012, 3.7% in 2015 and 4.1% in 2016. And immigration is at a historic high: around 5 million people migrated permanently to OECD countries in 2016, well above the previous peak level observed in 2007 before the economic crisis. Almost one in ten people living in the OECD are foreign-born, and among younger cohorts, over a quarter of 15- to 34-year-olds are foreign-born or native-born offspring of immigrant parents in OECD countries with available data.

Yet, the full economic and social inclusion of these various groups remains an elusive goal. Although women's labour force participation rates have risen in recent decades, women are still 12 percentage points less likely than men to engage in paid work across OECD countries. When women do enter the labour force they are more likely to work part-time, are less likely to advance to management, tend to work in less lucrative sectors, and still face discrimination. These factors combine to create a sizeable wage gap: the median full-time female worker earns almost 15% less than her male counterpart. This rate has barely changed in the past decade, and contributes (along with other factors) to a sizeable gender gap in incomes in old age.

Other groups also face substantial barriers to their successful inclusion. Changing jobs or finding new ones once they are unemployed is a challenge for older people. People with disabilities find it hard to participate in the labour market, even though many can and wish to work: in a study of 16 OECD countries, their employment rate is 27 percentage points lower than that of non-disabled people. Discrimination against migrants and LGBT people is still frequent. Field experiments show that homosexual applicants are only half as likely to be invited to a job interview as their heterosexual counterparts, and they are offered wages that are up to 10% lower. LGBT people also fare poorly in many other measures of well-being: while homosexuality has become more widely accepted over time in most OECD countries, homophobia remains widespread and a large majority of LGBT people feel rejected. The pervasive stigmatization of sexual and gender minorities affects their educational attainment and mental health, and institutional barriers to the legal recognition of same-sex couples have negative effects on relationship stability and their children's well-being. Immigrants are also at risk of social exclusion and their skills are often underused. In most OECD countries, they have lower employment rates than the native-born population. This is true even for highly-skilled immigrants, especially for those with foreign credentials as these often do not translate well to host country degrees. Migrant women are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market, with employment rates well below foreign-born men and native-born women and men in most countries. The native-born offspring of foreign-born people also face persisting obstacles. In the EU, their youth unemployment rate is nearly 50% higher than among young people with native-born parents.

The foreign-born as a percentage of the total population in OECD countries, 2000-2015



Note: Data refer to 2000 or the closest available year, and to 2015 or the most recent available year. The OECD and EU/EFTA averages are simple averages based on rates presented. For Japan and Korea, the data refer to the foreign population rather than the foreign-born population.

Source: OECD International Migration Database; Eurostat.

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Questions for discussion

What have businesses, governments or international organizations done to promote a diverse workforce and an inclusive society overall?

What are the most pressing challenges for a better inclusion of the increasingly diverse components of our societies?

Is the diversity challenge harder now than it was in the past?

Is there a backlash against diversity and inclusion?

Speakers

Jennifer Brown

CEO of Jennifer Brown Consulting (diversity and inclusion expert) and author of the best-seller *Inclusion: Diversity, the New Workplace and the Will to Change*

Hakim El Karoui

Essayist, Honorary President of the Club XXIe Siècle

Christl Kvam

State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Norway

Michael O'Flaherty

Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

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