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**Welcome remarks for the joint OECD-  
BMI-IRCC seminar on**

***Making Integration Work: Language  
Training for Adult Migrants***

**Stefano Scarpetta,  
Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs  
OECD**

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Dear State Secretary Kerber, Assistant Deputy Minister Valentine,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you on behalf of the OECD to the joint OECD seminar by the OECD, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada on language learning for adult migrants.

**Language is essential – for labour market and social integration alike.** Through language, we not only gain required skills but also build connections and access needed services.

Investing in language training for migrants can be costly for governments, but the **return on that investment is significant** for those who seize this opportunity. Our work at the OECD has shown that proficiency in the host-country language is linked with higher employment. Migrants who learn the language of their host country are also more likely to find employment that matches their skills and obtain higher salaries.

Understanding this, OECD countries invest in no other integration measure as much as into language training. At the same time, we still know too little with respect to what type of language training provides the best return in which context. **What are the barriers to language learning and what should countries do to address them? What is the right balance between labour market programmes and language learning?**

Today's event marks the launch of a publication – "Making Integration Work: Language Training for Adult Migrants" – that discusses these issues within the framework of 12 key lessons for policy-makers, based on good practice examples across the OECD. I would wholeheartedly like to thank the institutions involved, especially the German Ministry of Interior, for their support. This publication is the fifth in a series that includes our recently launched comparative report on good practices in the integration of youth with migrant parents, in addition to volumes on refugees, family migrants, and assessment of foreign qualifications.

My colleague, Lauren Matherne, will present you the key findings in more detail in a few minutes, but let me briefly stress some of the main takeaways.

First, **language learning is a journey that differs for each migrant**. Adult migrants will arrive in their host country with different education levels and linguistic profiles. They will also be primarily motivated to learn the language they need to navigate their lives – be that the vocabulary related to their profession or to communicate with the teachers of their children. To set migrants up for success, we should assess each migrant's ability to learn, and we should tailor the content of courses to their needs. We should pay particular attention to what migrants need to enter the workforce and provide for themselves.

This brings me to a second and related point: because adults often have multiple pressing obligations, **we need to reduce barriers to participation**. This can be achieved by designing the right set of incentives, providing childcare and evening courses for those who need them, and offering digital tools to enhance flexibility. Migrants should not be made to feel they have choose between pursuing language education and meeting the needs of their families or the expectations of their employers.

Third, while the recent trend in many countries has been to decentralise language provision, which can certainly broaden opportunities to learn, **coordination is essential to guarantee access and common standards across the country**. Engaging with the private sector and other non-traditional actors can increase the potential for local innovation, but the role of a single coordinating body to mainstream these innovations so all migrants who need them may benefit is crucial. As we observed throughout 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic, localised systems may experience real problems adapting to ensure service provision in times of rapid change or uncertainty.

In almost all OECD countries, we acknowledge there is work to be done in this important area. Designing better and more cost-effective language training requires more attention by policy makers. We can also benefit from the opportunity to share experiences from our partners across the OECD, and I very much look forward to that conversation today. We

are fortunate to be hosting this event alongside ministries and agencies from two countries – Germany and Canada - that have dedicated significant resources to providing and improving language training. I thank you already for your active engagement, and hand over to State Secretary Markus Kerber for his own welcome.