Education for Inclusive Societies

## Immigrant students in education: An overview from the OECD

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# The OECD Education for Inclusive Societies project

The project was developed as a response to the interest in countries to work both on equity and inclusion in education and on the role that education can play in developing more inclusive societies
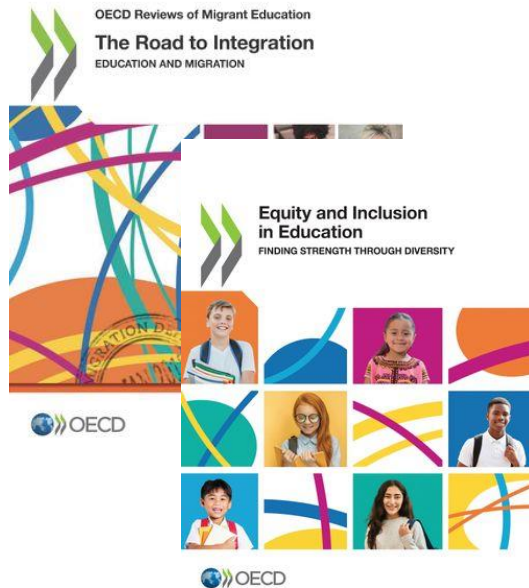
This project builds on the knowledge base generated by the *Strength through Diversity* project (2017-2022), which examined how best to support the success of learners from diverse backgrounds and also draw on its holistic framework.

Within and beyond the education system
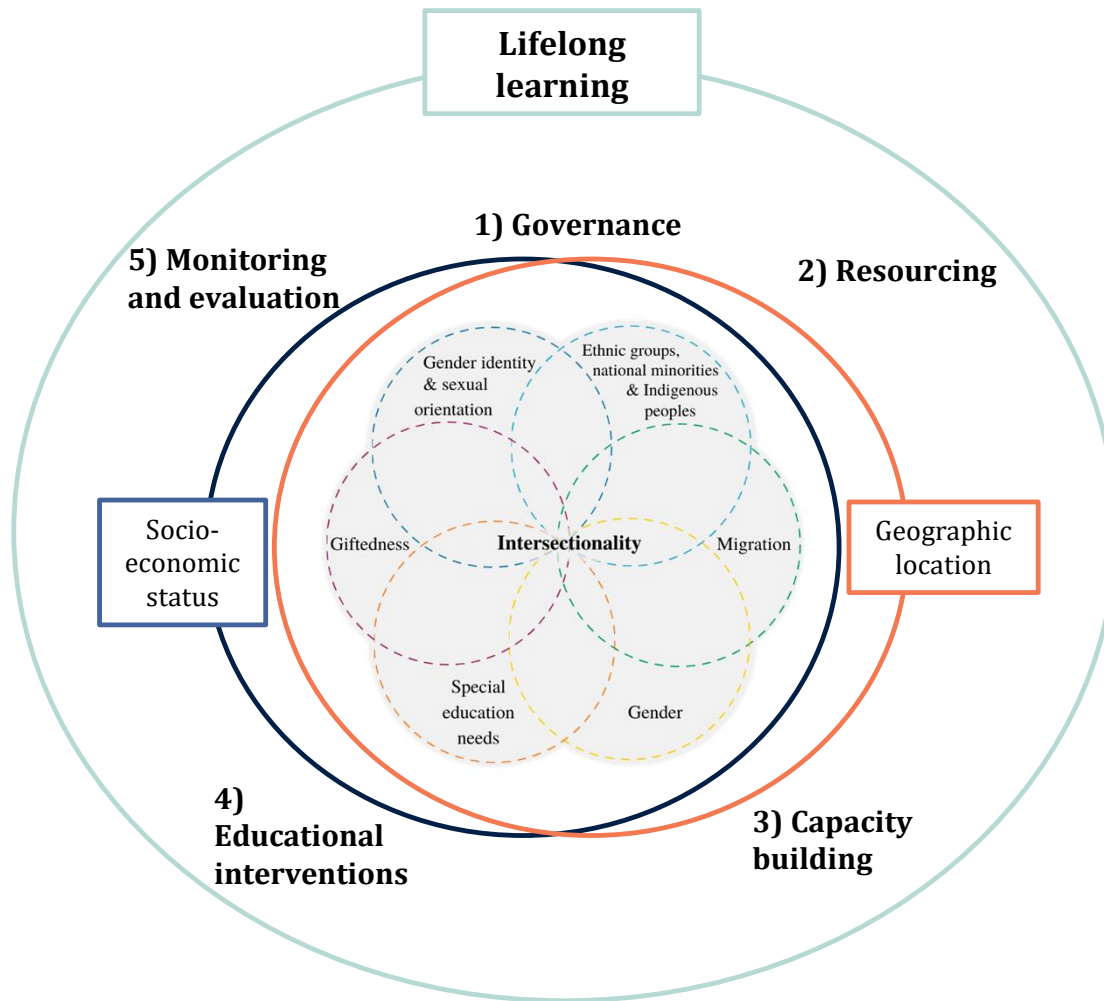
Percentage of immigrant students in Japan and OECD Countries

There are **few** students with an immigrant background in Japan
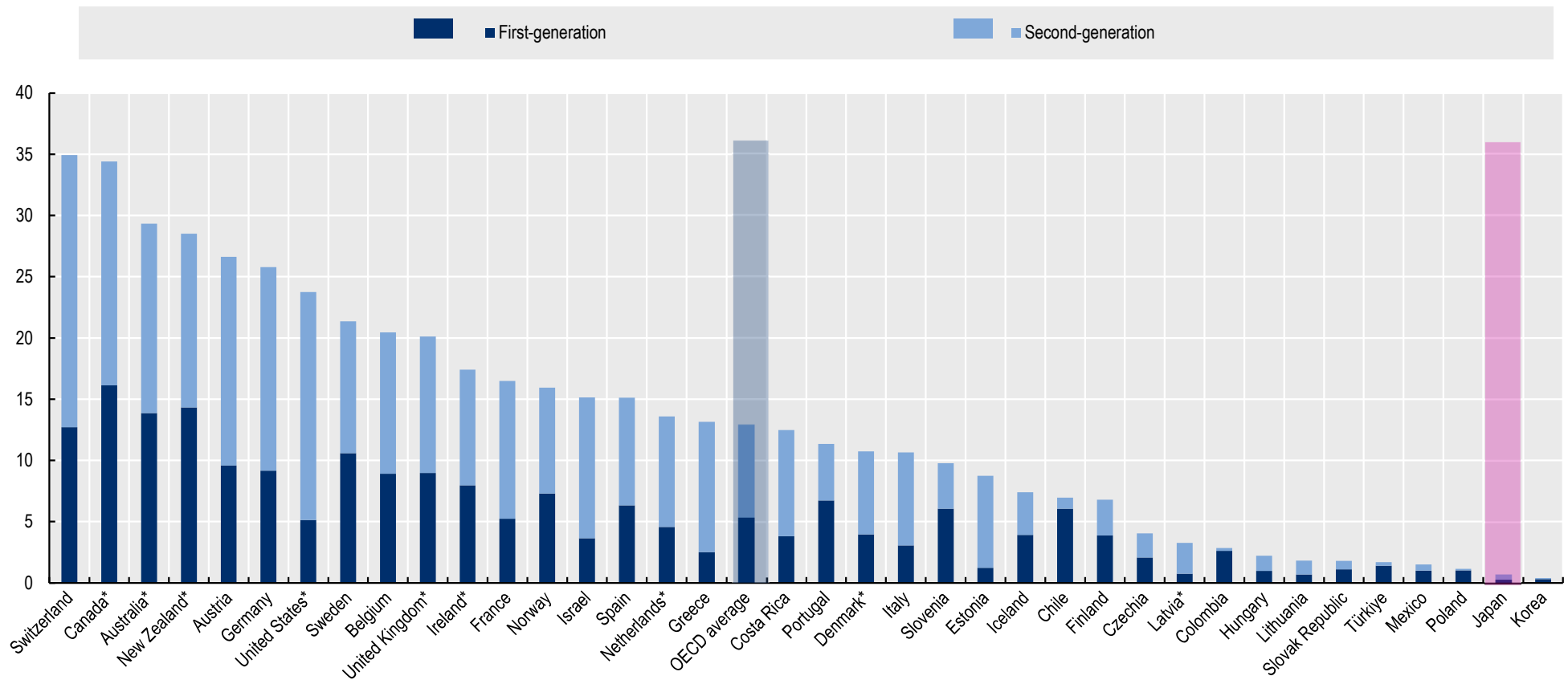
■ First-generation   ■ Second-generation

Source: OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education, Table I.B1.7.1, https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en.

Language spoken at home by immigrant background

Two-thirds of students with an immigrant background do **not** speak Japanese at home

— Non-immigrant students   ▲ Immigrant students

Source: OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education, Table I.B1.7.9, https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en.

Reading performance

In **reading**, students with an immigrant background in Japan underperform their peers, but this difference **disappears** once accounting for socio-economic background and language spoken at home
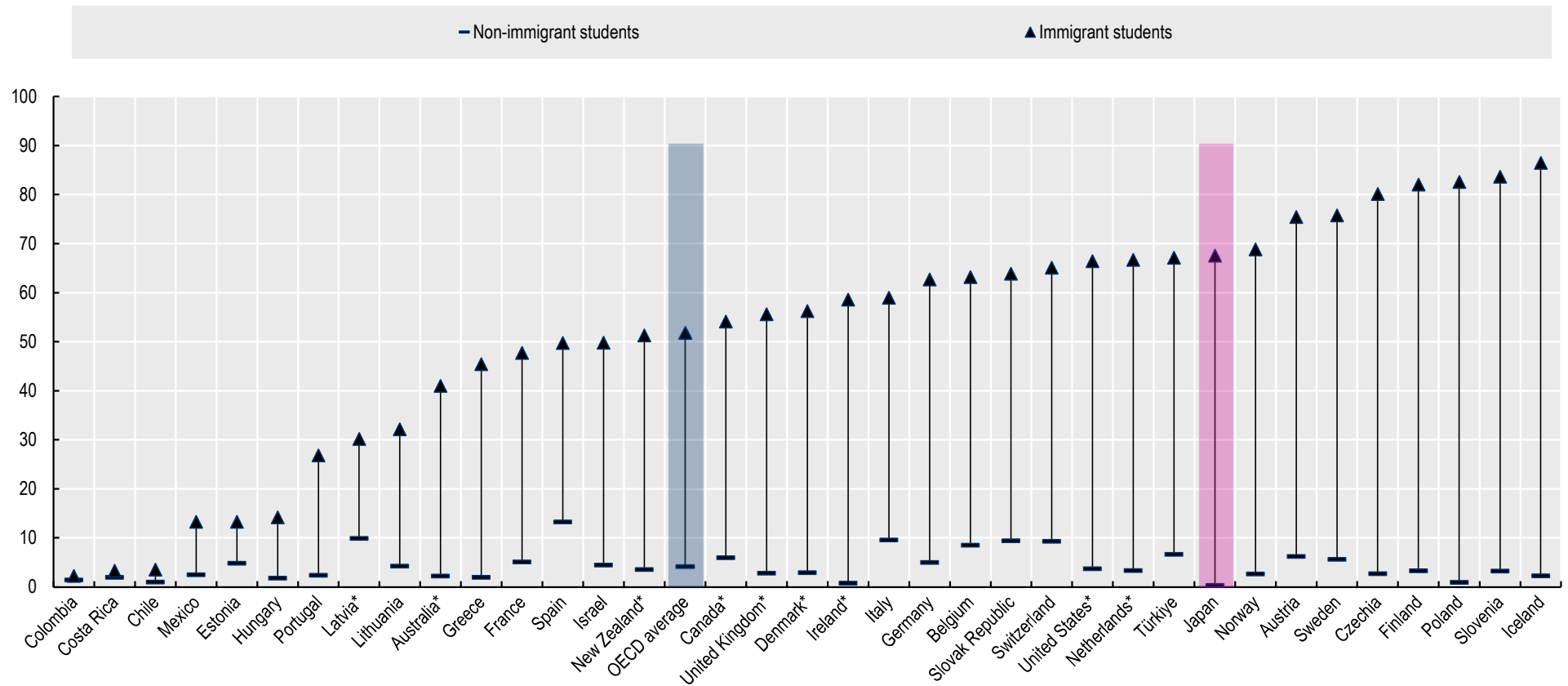

Source: OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education, Table I.B1.7.57, https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en.

Mathematical performance

In mathematics, differences are **insignificant** in Japan before and after accounting for socio-economic background and language spoken at home

Legend:
- Before accounting for students' socio-economic status and language spoken at home
- After accounting for students' socio-economic status and language spoken at home
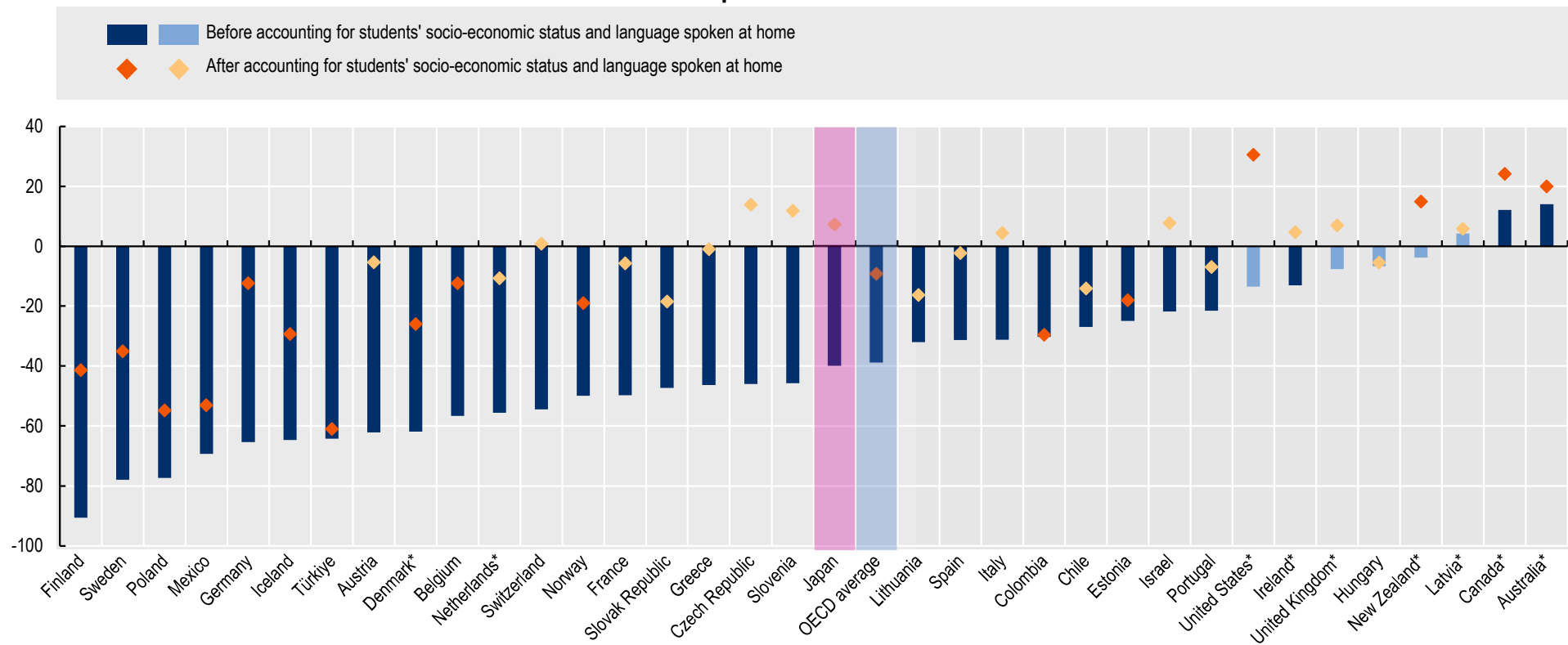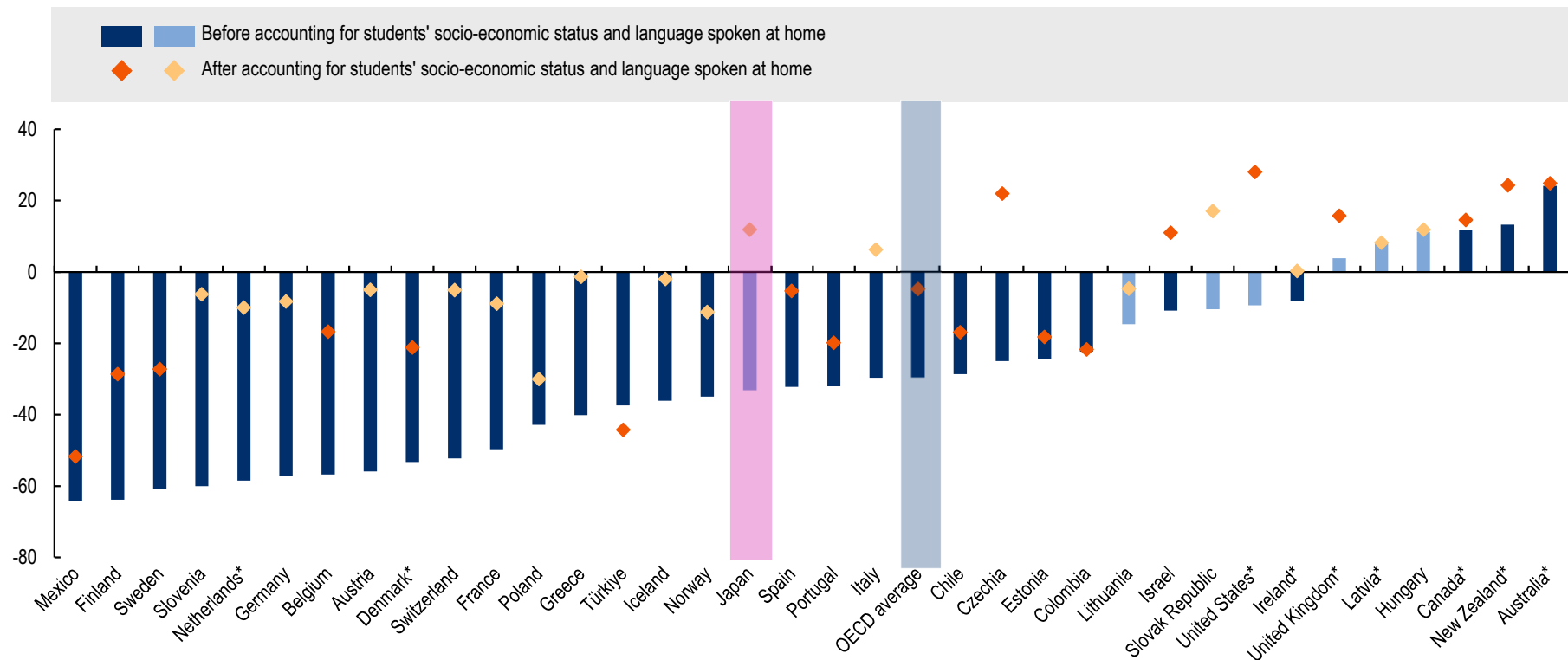
Source: OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education, Table I.B1.7.52, https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en.

Outcomes of students with an immigrant background outside of Japan

- On average across OECD countries, **differences persist**:
  - Between immigrant and native students and between different immigrant groups
  - Between early and late arrivals.

- Students with an immigrant background are at **increased risk** of:
  - Academic **underperformance**;
  - **Weak sense of belonging** to school community;
  - **Low life satisfaction**.

- Yet, many show high levels of **motivation to achieve**.

Disparities in outcomes at school often persist into adulthood

Unemployment rates, by immigration status and gender (2019)

Legend: ■ Men Foreign-born ■ Women Foreign-born ◆ Men Native-born ◆ Women Native-born

Y-axis: 0 to 40

Countries (x-axis): Greece, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, France, Italy, Finland, Belgium, Austria, Denmark, Latvia, Norway, OECD average (32), Luxembourg, Switzerland, Portugal, Germany, Canada, Estonia, Ireland, Netherlands, Iceland, Mexico, Lithuania, Poland, Australia, Slovenia, United Kingdom, Israel, New Zealand, United States, Hungary, Czech Republic

OECD average values shown: 9.0, 7.5

Academic outcomes: low participation in ECEC, below minimum reading proficiency (PISA), isolation in specific schools, but higher motivation and expectations

Social outcomes: lack of social inclusion, experience of discrimination and threats, worse mental health and sense of belonging

Economic outcomes: lower labour market activity rates, income levels, skills mismatch, higher unemployment risk and dependence on social welfare

Societal outcomes: loss in productivity, lower innovation and economic growth, lower potential fiscal contributions
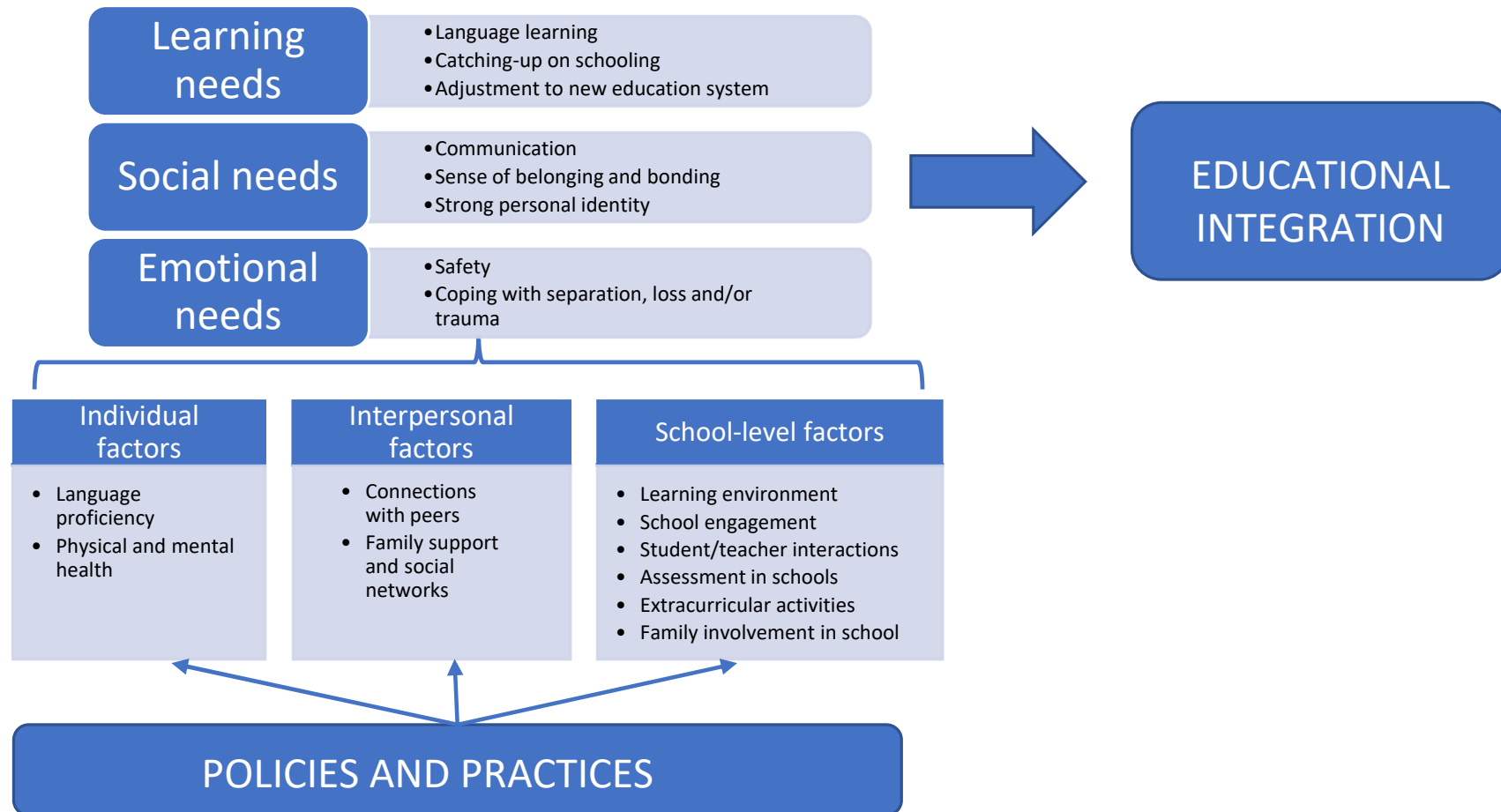
Countries are ranked in decreasing order by foreign-born men unemployment levels.
Source: Mezzanotte (2022), The social and economic rationale of inclusive education: An overview of the outcomes in education for diverse groups of students, Figure 2.7. https://doi.org/10.1787/bff7a85d-en

Holistic model for the educational integration of newcomer students

Learning needs
- Language learning
- Catching-up on schooling
- Adjustment to new education system

Social needs
- Communication
- Sense of belonging and bonding
- Strong personal identity

Emotional needs
- Safety
- Coping with separation, loss and/or trauma

EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

Individual factors
- Language proficiency
- Physical and mental health

Interpersonal factors
- Connections with peers
- Family support and social networks

School-level factors
- Learning environment
- School engagement
- Student/teacher interactions
- Assessment in schools
- Extracurricular activities
- Family involvement in school

POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Newcomer students have particular needs that require appropriate policy responses

- **Learning** needs
  - Learn host country language and develop mother tongue
  - Overcome interrupted schooling or limited education
  - Adjust to a new education system

- **Social** needs
  - Communicate with others
  - Bond with others and feel a sense of belonging
  - Develop a strong personal identity

- **Emotional** needs
  - Feel safe
  - Cope with separation, loss and/or trauma

Supporting the needs of immigrant students

Examples of practices

Learning needs	Social and emotional needs	Whole-school approaches	Extra-curricular activities
> In **Finland**, within the first year, an **individual curriculum** is designed for each student tailored to his/her needs. > In **Sweden**, all new arrivals are assessed in the **students' mother tongues**. Using the results, the principal and/or head teacher determine the best **educational trajectory**.	> In **Greece**, the *cross-thematic curriculum* was introduced from preschool to secondary education. It focuses on social and emotional learning (SEL) through projects, self-assessments, and key skills like **critical thinking** and **effective communication**. It also **includes parents** in the educational process.	> In the **Netherlands**, LOWAN ("Support for Newcomer Education") works with primary and secondary schools, taking a whole-school approach to address the **learning, social,** and **emotional needs** of newcomer students. LOWAN supports **teachers, municipalities, school boards,** and **local authorities**.	> The **European Sport Inclusion Network** (ESPIN): promotes equal access to **organised sport** among disadvantaged groups, including immigrants. > In **Canada**, the Newcomers to Notes programme **teaches piano** to refugee students.

Access to education for immigrant students in the OECD

- Most OECD countries offer **compulsory** education to immigrants, refugees and oftentimes undocumented individuals as a **legal right.**

- In **France,** all children must attend school from the ages of 3 and 16, **regardless of nationality or legal status**. However, if the children are not French-speaking, they are evaluated by the Academic Centre for Education of Newcomers and Travelers Children (CASNAV), which will enable teachers to place the child in a **dedicated language-learning initiation class.**

- In **Germany**, compulsory schooling does **not depend on nationality**. It therefore also applies to **foreign nationals and stateless persons** between age 6 to 15. Newly arrived children and teenagers from foreign backgrounds who do not speak German undergo specialised **"language integration classes"** with the aim of including them as soon as possible into regular school classes.

- In the **United Kingdom**, all children must attend primary and secondary education, which is **compulsory** and **free of charge**. Parents do not need to 'prove' their immigration status to apply: they have the **same rights** to a school place as any other children resident in the UK.

Challenges to access to education for immigrant students in the OECD

- **Barriers** to education for immigrant students include interruptions caused by **moving during the school year**. Some face challenges due to **unstable housing**, while others struggle with **language** skills, making it difficult to participate in regular classes or access lessons in their mother tongue.

- There may also be **capacity** issues in local schools, and in special language reception schools, particularly in **rural** areas.

Supporting language learning and reducing socio-economic differences

- In some countries, language is an important factor in explaining differences in academic performance and sense of belonging between native and immigrant students. In these countries, offering **language-specific training** for immigrant students is crucial.

- In other countries, **socio-economic background** plays a more important role than language in promoting academic proficiency and sense of belonging. In these countries, policies targeting socio-economic differences are key.

Relative importance of language and socio-economic background

Targeting efforts on key risk factors for the academic resilience of immigrant students

	Language relatively important	Average	Language relatively not important
Socio-economic status relatively important	Croatia, Hong Kong (China), Luxembourg	Greece, Netherlands	France, United States, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (Argentina)
Average	Jordan, Switzerland	Austria, Belgium, Germany, Slovenia, Sweden	Italy, Spain
Socio-economic status relatively not important	Estonia, Latvia, Slovak Republic	Denmark, Finland	Czech Republic, Portugal, United Kingdom

Notes: Dimension 1 (rows) sorts countries based on the share of the difference between native and immigrant students (first- and second-generation) in the likelihood of attaining baseline academic proficiency that is explained by differences in socio-economic status. The share is larger for countries in the top row and smaller for those in the one below. Dimension 2 (columns) sorts countries based on the difference between native-speaking and non-native speaking immigrant students in the likelihood of attaining baseline academic proficiency. The positive gap is larger for countries in the left column and smaller for those in the right one. Students who attain baseline academic proficiency are those who reach at least PISA proficiency Level 2 in all three core PISA subjects: science, reading and mathematics. Socio-economic status is measured through the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). Native-speaking students are students who speak most frequently at home the language of the PISA assessment. Non-native-speaking students are those who reported that the language they most frequently speak at home is different from the language of the PISA assessment.
Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database.

Supporting language learning

- **Assessing** the language and other skills of newcomer students can help identify the needs of each individual child and to establish **targeted** support as a first step.

- Language support requires an accurate assessment of children's language skills in **both** the mother tongue and the language of instruction, as well as in other skills.

- **Practical examples:**
  - In **Sweden**, all new arrivals are assessed in the **students' mother tongues**, which helps the principal and/or head teacher determine the best **educational trajectory**.
  - The **Build Swedish** (*Bygga svenska*) programme **supports teachers** to assess the language abilities of new arrivals through the provision of materials and workshops.
  - In **Finland**, newly arrived students are integrated into mainstream education with **personalised curricula** developed within the first year. These individualised plans consider factors like age, previous school history, and other specific circumstances.

Challenges for schools: Supporting teachers

- Teachers can feel **overwhelmed** as they try to welcome and teach newcomer students with a diverse range of needs

- Teachers can benefit from **diversity training** and **programmes** that help them to address the needs of their immigrant and refugee students.

- **Practical examples:**
  - At national level in **Austria**, Mobile Intercultural Teams (*mobile interkulturelle Teams, MIT*), are deployed to schools with high percentages of immigrant students. The teams offer **specialised support to teachers** and administration who work with immigrant children.
  - At university level in the **United States**, the School of Education at Indiana University has several **cultural immersion programmes** for trainee teachers. The goal is to help teachers to develop skills in teaching diverse students.
  - In **Finland**, the University of Oulu created a combined Bachelor and Master's Degree in *Intercultural Teacher Education* (ITE).

Training teachers for supporting immigrant students

Percentage of 15-year-olds students attending a school where their teachers report a need for training on the following (on average across participating OECD countries)
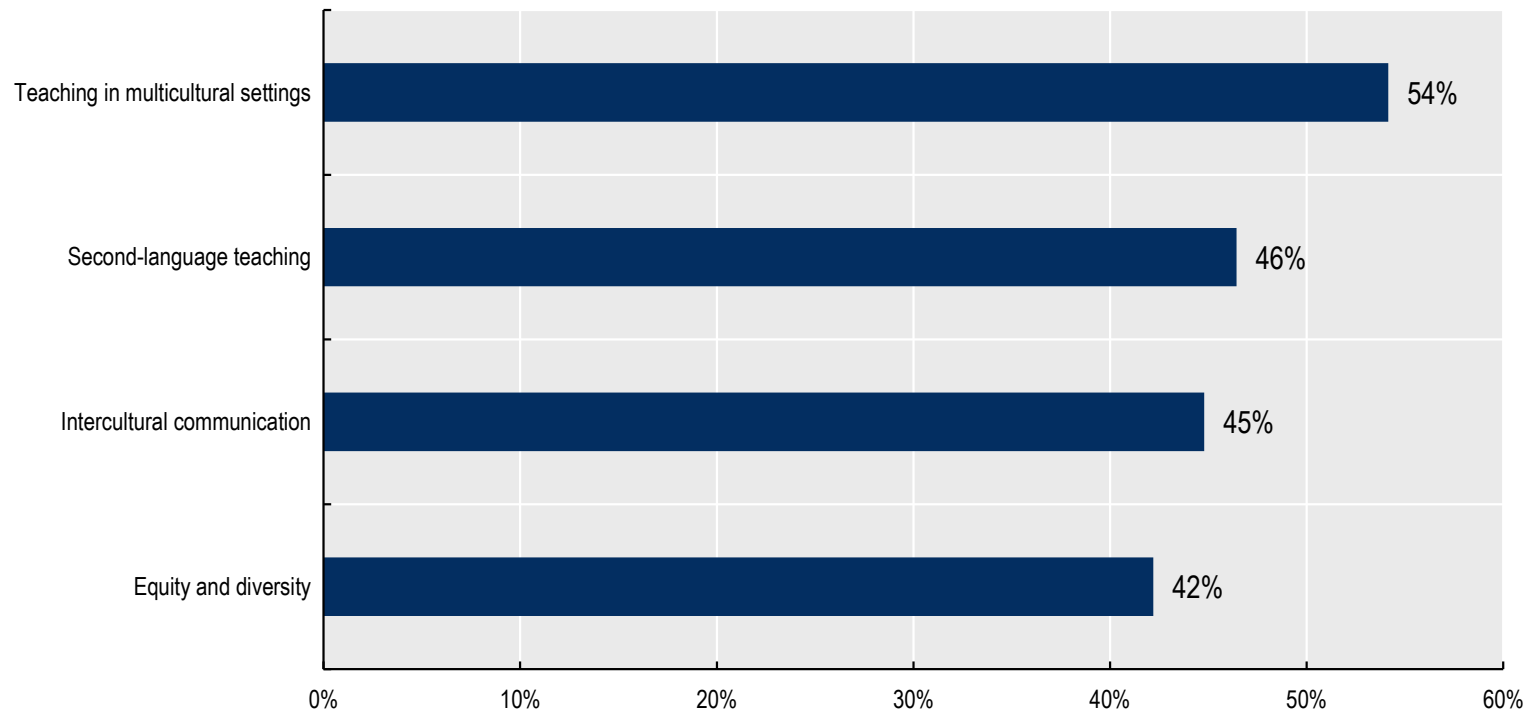
Challenges for schools: Adjustment

- **Native populations** and institutions such as schools, workplaces also experience potential challenges as a result of international migration: just as immigrants.

- Schools need to ensure that **all** students have the cognitive, social and emotional skills that are needed to interact with others. While this is important in general, it becomes crucial in **multilingual** and **multicultural** classroom.

- In order for countries to **benefit** from migration it is important that policies and practices implemented by education and training systems:

    1. support the **acquisition of skills and competences** among immigrant communities;
    2. promote the overall **social and emotional well-being** of immigrants;
    3. recognise differences in **migration-related experiences**; and
    4. build the skills that are necessary to deal with psychological and behavioural challenges induced by **acculturation** (among **both** immigrants and natives).

Summary: Policy lessons for holistic education

- Provide **access to all levels** of education

- Introduce **early assessment** and **individualised learning plans**

- Offer **flexible** learning, pathways and transitions

- Provide **language support** for development of language of host country and mother tongues

- Ensure **supportive learning environment** compatible with students' cultures and identity formation

- Promote social interactions, **whole-school** and **whole-community** approaches

- Build capacity for **inclusive teaching** and increase diversity in the teaching workforce (teachers with an immigrant background)
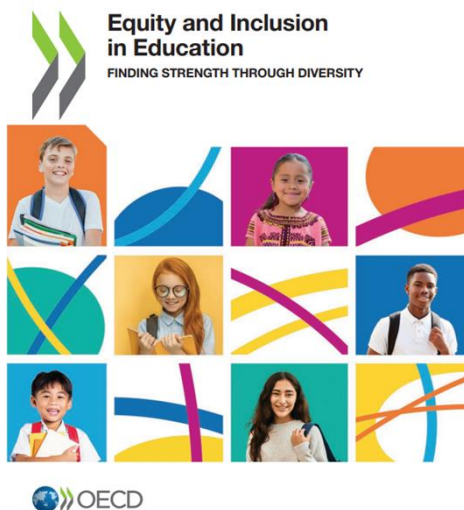
Selected sources

- Working papers & reports:
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  - Cerna, L. et al. (2019), "Strength through diversity: Spotlight Report for Sweden", OECD Education Working Paper, No. 194, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/059ce467-en
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  - OECD (2018), The Resilience of Students with an Immigrant Background: Factors that Shape Well-being, OECD Reviews of Migrant Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264292093-en.
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  - Siarova, H. and L. van der Graaf (2022), "Multi-stakeholder approach for better integration of refugee students: Stakeholder engagement in the practice-research-policy transfer in refugee education policy", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 265, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/82b390fb-en.

- Other resources are available at: https://www.oecd.org/education/strength-through-diversity/

CONTACTS

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New OECD Report **"Equity and Inclusion in education: Finding strength through Diversity"** is available at https://doi.org/10.1787/e9072e21-en.
Japanese translation of report coming out in June 2024.

For more information on the topic:
https://www.oecd.org/education/strength-through-diversity/