

As a response to the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the OECD launched the Champion Mayors for Inclusive Growth Initiative in 2016. Champion Mayors from around the world form a coalition of willing leaders who have committed to tackling inequalities and promoting more inclusive economic growth in cities. Having participated in this initiative since 2017, Governor Koike started to serve as the Vice Chair with a special responsibility for women and children from September 24, 2025.

Ms. Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director for the OECD Center for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities spoke about the Initiative and inclusive growth in cities and regions.



1 Could you walk us through the objectives and activities of the OECD Champion Mayors for Inclusive Growth Initiative?

The OECD Champion Mayors for Inclusive Growth Initiative was launched in 2016 in response to rising inequalities. At the time, we recognised that cities held many of the key powers to promote inclusive growth — and that their voices really needed to be heard more prominently on the global stage.

What makes this Initiative unique is that it's a coalition of mayors, not just a network of cities. Each mayor is invited based on their personal commitment to inclusive economic growth and their ability to act as a global ambassador for these values.

OECD Champion Mayors for Inclusive Growth

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Today, the Initiative includes 71 mayors from around the world. And in 2022, we took a further step by establishing a Steering Group to strengthen the leadership of the Initiative. One of the members is Governor Yuriko Koike of Tokyo, who has been particularly active on issues such as climate change, disaster management, and support for women and children.

We are delighted that Governor Koike has accepted to serve as Vice Chair of the OECD Champion Mayors Steering Group, with a special responsibility for women and children. Her outstanding leadership and dedication to inclusive growth and to the Champion Mayors Initiative make her ideally suited for this role, and we look forward to her valuable contributions to the Initiative's leadership as Vice Chair.

Since its founding, Champion Mayors have gathered for a number of high-level meetings where they've endorsed a series of documents that help set the direction of the Initiative.

Beyond those meetings, we also engage in a range of activities. For example, we help connect local leaders to national governments — through regular updates to OECD committees like the OECD Regional Development Policy Committee and the OECD Local Employment and Economic Development Committee, as well as dialogue with the OECD Council of Ambassadors and OECD Roundtable of Mayors and Ministers.

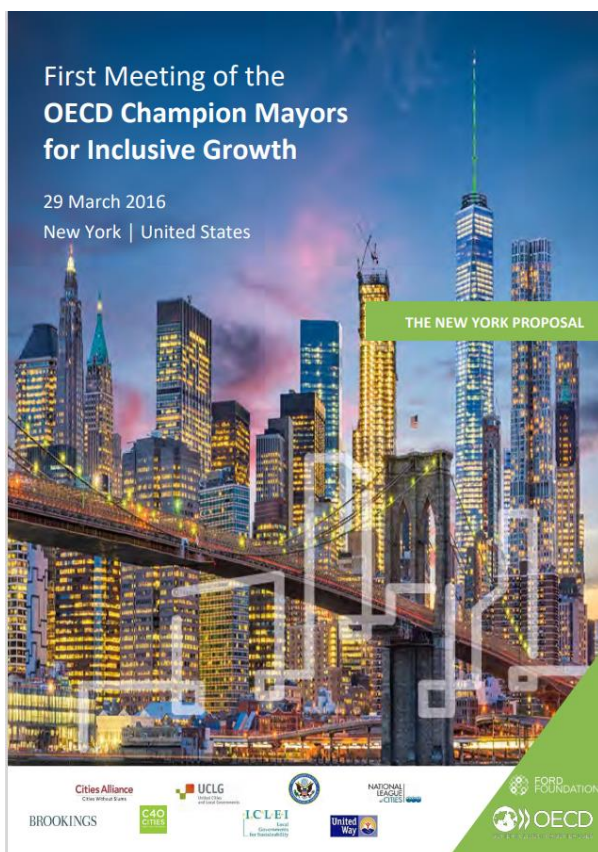
We also support mayors by providing them with access to OECD data and analysis, for example the [OECD Local Data Portal](#) which provides internationally comparable data across hundreds of indicators for over 220 000 municipalities. We have also undertaken city-specific studies for Champion Mayors and they regularly participate in broader OECD research programs.

Another important area is bringing mayors to the global stage and promoting knowledge-sharing — for instance, through their participation in the G7/U7, G20/U20, COP, and regular partnership with Bloomberg CityLab.

And finally, we help mayors strengthen their communications so they can more effectively advocate for inclusive growth.

2 What kind of initiatives are necessary for cities and regions to achieve inclusive economic growth?

I think a useful starting point is the New York Proposal, which was adopted in 2016 by the OECD Champion Mayors. It sets out the core elements of what inclusive economic growth looks like at the local level.



First, it calls for an inclusive education system — one that allows people of all ages and backgrounds to develop their human capital, acquire relevant skills, and improve their life chances. Education really sits at the heart of opportunity.

Second, it highlights the need for an inclusive labour market. This means tapping the full potential of women, youth, older populations, migrants and immigrants, foreign-born populations, and people from all backgrounds. It's about ensuring access to quality jobs, and also promoting inclusive entrepreneurship as a pathway to opportunity.

A third pillar is an inclusive housing market and urban environment — where everyone can access quality, affordable housing in safe, healthy neighbourhoods for all segments of the population.

Another key component is inclusive infrastructure and public services. That includes transport systems that connect people to opportunities for all, as well as affordable, reliable public services, such as water, energy, and waste management. Digital infrastructure is now becoming just as important as physical infrastructure.

We've also emphasised the need to align inclusive growth with the climate transition. That means protecting vulnerable groups from the negative impacts of climate change, making sure to manage the trade-offs between policies to mitigate climate change and equity objectives, and seize potential synergies.

And beyond these pillars, the OECD recognizes the importance of ensuring that areas collaborate rather than compete – across different urban areas and between rural and urban areas. We know that cities can drive better outcomes for the areas that surround them – by providing jobs, services and new business opportunities.

But we need to put in place the right policies to ensure that surrounding areas benefit from these linkages and opportunities. National governments can support these rural-urban partnerships. For instance, they can create fiscal incentives for local areas to collaborate, build coordination mechanisms into spatial planning legislation, and establish legal frameworks for cooperation, such as shared service agreements. These elements are outlined in the OECD Principles on Urban Policy and OECD Principles on Rural Policy.

3 Tokyo believes that for the development of the whole country, “coexistence and co-prosperity” is vital for Tokyo and the rural areas. What do you think about this?

At the OECD, we've gathered clear evidence showing the positive spillovers that cities can generate for their broader regions. And that's exactly why both the **OECD Principles on Urban Policy** and **OECD Principles on Rural Policy** place a strong emphasis on urban-rural partnerships.

In that sense, we welcome Tokyo's 2050 Strategy and its emphasis on building stronger linkage between Tokyo and other regions.



And this isn't unique to Japan. In many countries, we've seen that it's not about cities and rural areas competing against each other — but rather about collaboration, and finding complementary specialisms, strategies and policies that can collectively drive national prosperity.

4 The declining birthrate is a major social issue in Japan. As a measure to combat this issue, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is leading the nation in providing seamless support in all relationship stages from dating, marriage, pregnancy, childbirth and child-rearing. What do you think of Tokyo's situation and initiatives?

Many OECD countries are experiencing declining birthrates, not just Japan.

There are many factors that can influence the decision to have a family. Things like household income, tax and benefit systems, the cost of childcare and housing — all of these play a role in whether people decide to have children, when they have them, and how many they feel they can support.

But across the OECD we see that if women are able to combine work and family life, and participate in economic life on an equal footing, this leads both to better economic outcomes and higher fertility rates.

In that spirit, we welcome the emphasis that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government has placed on supporting young families and parents, and also Governor Koike's policies to promote women's economic participation, empowerment and entrepreneurship. Tokyo can be a laboratory of innovation, incubating good policies that can then be encouraged in other parts of the country.

5 People migrate from rural areas to the greater Tokyo area mostly because they cannot find the type of work they prefer or can make use of their abilities in the local area. Also, in Japan, a higher percentage of people in rural areas feel a sense of entrapment in local relationships and communities than in urban areas.

What do you think about the situation in Japan? And what measures are necessary to address the shrinking population?

The question of internal migration – especially outmigration from rural areas to cities – is confronting many OECD countries.

This is a situation we see not only in Japan but in many OECD countries — where people, especially young people, leave rural areas for large cities. And in some countries, it goes with high regional disparities. But this is not the case in Japan. Japan has the lowest level of regional disparities when compared to OECD countries.

Successful regional development should provide people a genuine choice about where to live – and that means people must have a good reason to stay.

That's why at the OECD, we are looking at how to make regions more attractive through a programme called Rethinking Regional Attractiveness. The focus of this work is to better understand how regions — including less populated or shrinking ones — can attract not only people, but also investors and visitors. So far we have worked with over 40 regions from around the world. Each story is different, but there are six pillars that all places can consider.

First, while economic competitiveness is clearly important, what we've found is that it's not simply about cutting taxes or offering financial subsidies. Those tools can help, but they're not enough on their own. What really makes a difference is when regions build on their existing strengths. That means investing in infrastructure, improving both physical and digital connectivity, and creating innovation ecosystems — for example, by strengthening the role of universities and supporting local entrepreneurship and business scale-up. It also includes helping people develop skills locally, and not only relying on attracting talent from outside. Making better use of an ageing workforce is something that's becoming increasingly relevant in many areas.

Connectivity, especially digital connectivity, is another key factor. Too often, the regions that are lagging behind are the ones that are most disconnected — both in terms of transportation and internet access. Across the OECD, we see that internet speeds in cities are, on average, about 75 percent higher than in rural areas. And that digital divide means that many rural communities haven't been able to take advantage of new opportunities, like remote work, which could otherwise help attract or retain residents.

Housing and land use are also critical. Affordable and good-quality housing is essential, especially for drawing in younger people and families. At the same time, we know that many struggling regions face the opposite problem — a surplus of vacant homes, which can depress investment and weaken community pride.

Access to quality public services is equally important. In areas with declining populations, it becomes more expensive — and often more difficult — to provide essential services like education, healthcare, childcare, and elder care. In many OECD countries, rural schools spend up to 20 percent more per student, yet still often see lower educational outcomes.

But the story doesn't end with economics and services. Cultural and touristic assets, for example, can play a huge role in shaping the identity and appeal of a place, especially for younger generations. Culture isn't just an economic sector — it's part of what makes a community feel vibrant and livable. And of course, access to the natural environment can be a major draw, particularly for people who are rethinking their work-life balance.

We also know that these different elements are all underpinned by softer attributes like local leadership and social infrastructure and capital.

So in our view, what's really needed now is a more holistic approach to regional development. We have to move away from isolated or one-off policy interventions and instead think about attractiveness in a comprehensive way — one that brings together economic, social, cultural, and environmental elements into a single, integrated strategy.

Here Tokyo can also provide the role of a laboratory for innovation, by promoting measures that can be duplicated in other parts of the country. For example, Governor Koike's policies to promote female entrepreneurship can be an inspiration to other parts of Japan looking to create more economic opportunities for women.