

LMF3: Maternal employment by partnership status

Definitions and methodology

Maternal employment rates concern mothers in paid work with dependent children and are annual averages calculated from various national employment or household surveys and from the European Labour Force Survey. Partnered fathers and mothers are married or cohabiting parents in couple families, while sole parents are adults not living with a partner, for whatever reason, with at least one dependent child (SF1). The European Labour Force Survey (ELFS) only identifies couple families and sole-parent families as such when these families do not share a household with other adults. For example, couples living with one or more other adults and sole parents living with at least two other adults in the household (e.g. the parents of a sole parent) are categorised as “other” families in the ELFS. Available information for non-European countries is based on “nuclear families” or “census families” and compared to such data the proportion of sole parent families in all households as reported in the ELFS is relatively low (see SF1). – Data on “census-families” is generally only available with 10-year intervals (see “comparability and data issues” and LMF2 for the definition of paid employment).

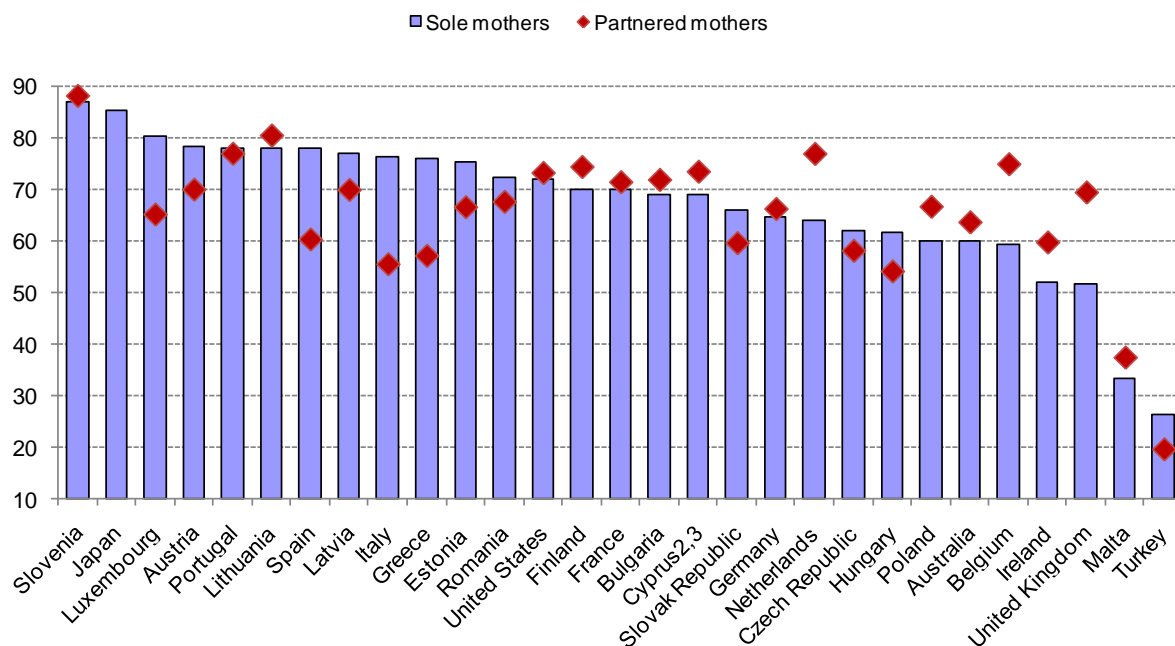
The data below concern partnered and sole parents aged 15 to 64, unless otherwise specified. In the ELFS dependent children are defined as children aged 0 to 14. For the US, data refers to household with at least one child under the age of 18; for New Zealand, Sweden and Switzerland, data covers households with children aged 0 up to and including 16 years of age.

Key findings

Chart LMF3.1 shows maternal employment rates by partnership status. The proportion of sole-mothers in paid employment is higher than that of partnered mothers in most countries, particularly in Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and the Slovak Republic where differences are around 20 percentage points. In southern European countries, sole parents have to engage in paid work as public benefits for sole parents are low, often relying on informal networks for care support. By contrast, in countries where income support for sole parents is substantial and where (at least until recently) there is little expectation of them being in work, employment rates among sole mothers are much lower than those of partnered mothers, as for example, in Australia, Ireland and the UK.

Other relevant indicators: SF1: Family size and composition; SF2: Children in families; LMF2: Maternal employment LMF8 and LMF9 Usual working hours distribution among couple and sole parents; and CO7: Trends in the income position of different household types.

Chart LMF3.1 Sole mothers and partnered mothers aged 15 to 64 in paid employment, 2007¹



1) Year 2007, except 2006 for Australia.

2) Footnote by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to « Cyprus » relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue".

3) Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics; United States Bureau of Labour Statistics; all other EU-countries and Turkey, Eurostat Labour Force Survey.

Table LMF3.1 shows that employment rates of sole mothers are significantly lower than employment rates among sole fathers. The largest 'gender' gaps (with differences above 15 percentage points between sole fathers and sole mothers) can be found in Belgium, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Turkey and the UK, all countries where sole-parent employment rates are relatively low.

Considering all sole parents, Table LMF3.1 shows that at above 80%, sole-parent employment rates are highest in Denmark, Iceland, Japan, Luxembourg and Sweden, and lowest, at below 60% in New Zealand, Turkey and the UK. Table LMF3.1 also shows that employment rates for sole parents age 25 to 49 are only around 1 percentage point higher than for all sole parents of working age; differences are somewhat larger in the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland and the UK.

Table LMF3.1 Sole-parents in paid employment by year, sex and age, 2007¹

	Employment rates by sex		Employment rates by age	
	Sole parents aged 15-64		Sole parents	
	Mothers	Fathers	15-64	25-49
Australia	60.0	72.0	62.0	-
Austria	78.3	80.5	78.4	79.5
Belgium	59.2	75.6	61.1	62.5
Bulgaria	69.0	82.8	71.8	76.5
Canada	:	:	67.6	:
Cyprus^{2,3}	68.9	78.7	69.2	71.4
Czech Republic	61.9	86.6	63.6	66.7
Denmark	:	:	82.0	:
Estonia	75.4	96.3	77.6	82.2
Finland	70.2	65.9	69.7	72.4
France	69.9	81.0	71.3	72.8
Germany	64.6	75.9	65.5	68.6
Greece	76.0	94.9	77.5	78.4
Hungary	61.6	75.3	62.8	65.0
Iceland	81.0			
Ireland	52.0	70.2	:	:
Italy	76.4	90.4	77.6	78.2
Japan⁴	85.4	90	85.9	87.8
Lithuania	77.0	80.1	77.5	79.1
Latvia	78.0	95.8	79.2	81.3
Luxembourg	80.2	97.2	82.0	83.6
Malta	33.3	45.2	35.1	33.9
Netherlands	63.8	82.5	65.8	67.7
New Zealand	:	:	54.4	:
Norway	:	:	69.0	:
Poland	60.1	75.0	61.2	64.2
Portugal	78.1	73.0	77.5	79.3
Romania	72.4	80.7	73.4	79.7
Slovak Republic	65.9	88.9	71.1	71.2
Slovenia	87.1	97.2	:	88.2
Spain	78.0	89.0	79.5	80.3
Sweden	:	:	81.1	:
Switzerland	:	:	67.0	:
Turkey	26.3	73.9	28.7	30.0
United Kingdom	51.8	66.7	53.1	57.3
United States	72.8	85.2	75.3	
OECD average	67.0	80.5	68.9	70.3
EU- average	68.8	81.0	70.5	72.5

1) Data are for 2007, except year 2005 for Canada, Japan, Denmark, Switzerland and Sweden; 2006 for Australia and New Zealand.

2) and 3) see notes 1 and 2 to Chart LMF3.1

4) age range is from 30 to 49 years old for the last column

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics; Statistics Canada (2006 Census of Population); Japan: 2007 Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions of the People on Health and Welfare; Mexican authorities (National Survey on Occupation and Employment 2008); New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings 2006; United States Bureau of Labour Statistics; Central Statistics Office Ireland (Quarterly National Household Survey 2006); Swiss authorities (Swiss Labour Force Survey 2005); Swedish authorities (Level-of-living Conditions Survey 2005); all other EU-countries, 2007 ELFS.

Comparability and data issues

This indicator was constructed using information from the European Labour Force survey, national Labour Force Surveys or information provided by national authorities. Labour Force Surveys are not specifically designed to provide information on family or partnership status, and relative small sample sizes (e.g. on the total number of sole mothers in employment) could affect the results. As described above and in SF1, the European Labour Force Survey cannot separately identify sole-parents living with other adults in households (e.g. extended families). Compared to data sources which can separately identify such sole-parents families (census), the proportion of sole parent families in the overall number of households as reported by the ELFS is relatively low; which can affect the sole-parent employment rate as measured, particularly in countries where extended families are not uncommon, e.g. in southern and eastern Europe.

Other factors that need to be taken into account when comparing figures across countries are differences in years of reference and age groups for the children covered in the samples.

Further reading: EU Labour Force Survey database, User Guide, http://circa.europa.eu/irc/dsis/employment/info/data/eu_lfs/index.htm; and, OECD (2007), Babies and Bosses, Reconciling Work and Family life, A Synthesis of Findings for OECD countries.