

LMF1.3: Maternal employment by partnership status

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on maternal employment by partnership status through two main measures:

- i. *Employment rates for partnered women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14*, with 'partnered women' defined as those who live in the same household as a spouse or cohabiting partner (with the exception of Canada, where the woman's partnership status is based on their civil status), and with 'children' defined as any children aged 0-14 inclusive (for Canada, children aged 0-15, for Sweden 0-18, and for the United States 0-17) who live in the same household as the woman and are reported as the child of the woman (including both biological children and step or adoptive children). Women with children who do not live in the same household are not included, nor are women with children aged 15 or older, regardless of whether or not the child lives in the same household and/or is dependent on the woman.
- ii. *Employment rates for single women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14*, with single women defined as those without a spouse or cohabiting partner in the same household (with the exception of Canada, where the woman's partnership status is based on their civil status), and 'children' again defined as any children aged 0-14 inclusive (for Canada, children aged 0-15, for Sweden 0-18, and for the United States 0-17) who live in the same household as the woman and are reported as the child of the woman (including both biological children and step or adoptive children).

In both cases the household may contain other adults – including siblings or grandparents or other relatives and non-relatives – with the woman's partnership status based only on whether or not a partner is present.

To explore whether the impact of partnership on the likelihood of employment differs with socio-economic status, this indicator also presents information on employment rates for partnered and for single mothers by education level:

- iii. *Employment rates for partnered women and for single women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child (aged 0-14) by level of educational attainment*. Educational attainment is measured here using the standard three-part ordinal variable based on the ISCED 2011 classification system: 'low education' corresponds to a highest level of educational attainment at ISCED 2011 levels 0-2 (early-childhood education, primary or lower secondary education); 'medium education' reflects a highest level of educational attainment at ISCED 2011 levels 3-4 (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education); and 'high education' corresponds to a highest level of educational attainment at ISCED 2011 levels 5-8 (short-cycle tertiary education, bachelor or equivalent, master or equivalent, doctoral or equivalent).

And employment rates for partnered mothers by the employment status of their partner:

- i. *Employment rates for partnered women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child (aged 0-14) by partner's employment status*, with the partner classified as either 'employed' or 'not employed' according to the standard [ILO guidelines](#).

Other relevant indicators: SF1.1: Family size and composition; SF1.2: Children in families; LMF1.2: Maternal employment; LMF2.2 and LMF2.3 Usual working hours' distribution among couple and sole parents;

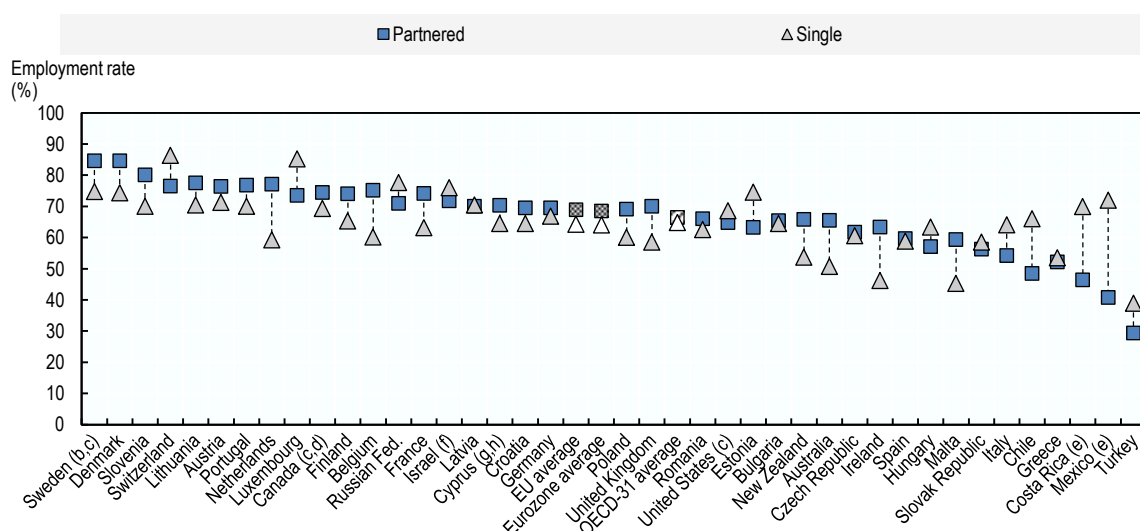
Information is presented only for women aged 15-64, although data for 25-54 year olds are also available for many OECD countries in the [associated .xls file](#). Definitions of ‘employment’ follow [ILO guidelines](#) with all people who during a specified reference period were either in paid employment or were self-employed for at least one hour being classified as ‘employed’.

Key findings

The extent and direction with which maternal employment rates differ with partnership status varies considerably across OECD countries (Chart LMF1.3.A). In just under two-thirds of OECD countries, employment rates for partnered mothers are higher than those for single mothers. The gap tends to be large in Northern European and Anglophone OECD countries – in Australia, Belgium, Denmark, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom, for example, employment rates for single mothers are around ten or more percentage points lower than those for partnered mothers – and is biggest in Ireland, where around 63.3% of partnered mothers are in work, compared to 46.2% of single mothers. However, in the remaining third of OECD countries employment rates for single mothers are *higher* than those for partnered mothers. In Chile, Estonia, and Luxembourg, for example, employment rates for single mothers are at least 10 percentage points higher than employment rates for partnered mothers. In Mexico, the difference is over 30 percentage points.

Chart LMF1.3.A. Employment rates for partnered mothers and single mothers, 2014 or latest available^a

Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 year olds^b) with at least one child aged 0-14^c, by partnership status



a) Data for Denmark and Finland refer to 2012, and for Chile, Germany, and Turkey to 2013

b) For Sweden, women aged between 15-74

c) For Canada, children aged 0-15, for Sweden children aged 0-18, and for the United States children aged 0-17

d) For Canada partnership status is based on civil status: 'partnered' women are those whose civil status is 'married' or 'living in common-law', and single women are those who are 'separated', 'divorced', 'widowed' or 'single, never married'.

e) For Costa Rica and Mexico, data cover mothers who are reported as the head of the household or the spouse/partner of the head of the household, only.

f) The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

g) 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";

h) 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.

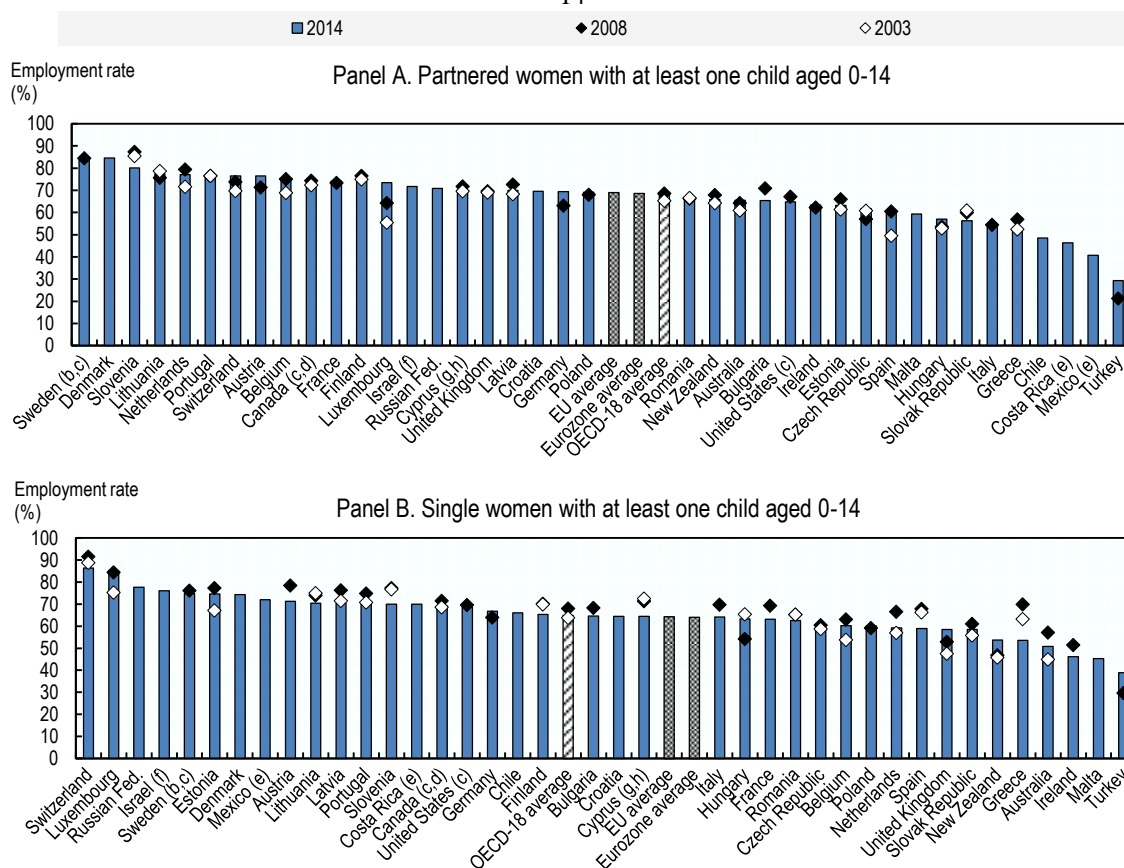
Sources: [for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); [for Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey](#); [for Chile, CASEN](#); [for Costa Rica, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland and the Russian Federation, OECD questionnaire](#); [for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey](#); [for Sweden, Statistics Sweden](#); [for Turkey, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey](#); [for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

Trends in employment rates for partnered mothers are mixed (Chart LMF1.3.B, panel A). In many OECD countries employment rates for partnered mothers were increasing prior to the start of the economic crisis in 2008, and while several have seen the rate continue to increase since – particularly Luxembourg, where the rate has grown by over nine percentage points since 2008 – others have seen employment among partnered mothers stagnate and in some cases fall back. In Greece, for example, the employment rate among partnered mothers has fallen by almost 5 percentage points since 2008. In Slovenia, it has declined by over 7 percentage points.

Many OECD countries have also seen employment among single mothers decline since the start of the economic crisis (Chart LMF1.3.B, panel B). Again, employment rates for single mothers were increasing in most OECD countries prior to 2008, but since the onset of the crisis many have seen the rate fall. In some cases, the declines are substantial. In Spain and the Netherlands, for instance, the employment rate among single mothers has decreased by over 7 percentage points since 2008. In Greece, it has fallen by over 16 percentage points.

Chart LMF1.3.B. Employment rates for partnered mothers and single mothers, 2003, 2008 and 2014 or latest available^a

Employment rates (%) for partnered women and single women (15-64 year olds^b) with at least one child aged 0-14^c



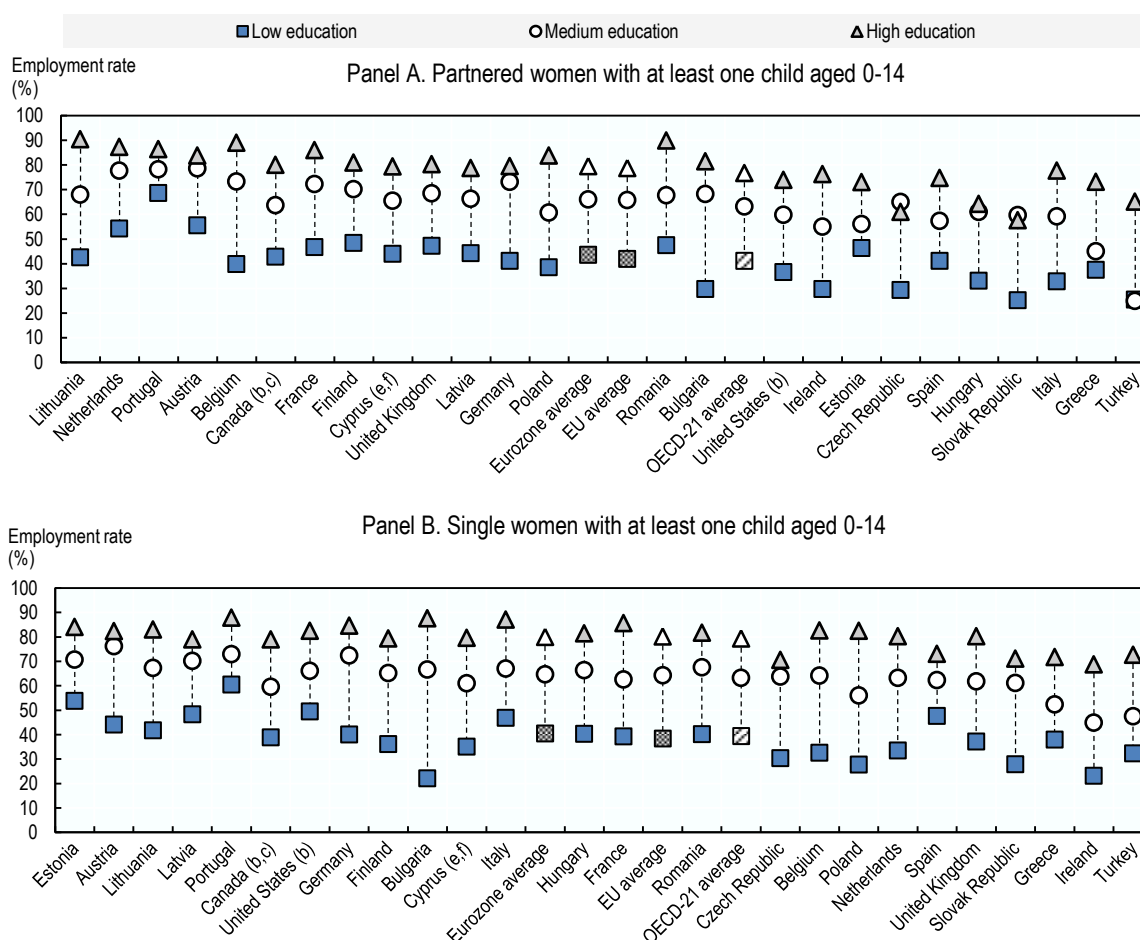
a) Data for Denmark and Finland refer to 2012, and for Chile, Germany, and Turkey to 2013
 b) For Sweden, women aged 15-74
 c) For Canada, children aged 0-15, for Sweden children aged 0-18, and for the United States children aged 0-17
 d) For Canada partnership status is based on civil status: 'partnered' women are those whose civil status is 'married' or 'living in common-law', and single women are those who are 'separated', 'divorced', 'widowed' or 'single, never married'.
 e) For Costa Rica and Mexico, data cover mothers who are reported as the head of the household or the spouse/partner of the head of the household, only.
 f) See note f) to Chart LMF1.3.A
 g) See note g) to Chart LMF1.3.A
 h) See note h) to Chart LMF1.3.A

Sources: for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics; for Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey; for Chile, CASEN; for Costa Rica, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland and the Russian Federation, OECD questionnaire; for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey; for Sweden, Statistics Sweden; for Turkey, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey; for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey

Employment rates for all mothers differ with education (see indicator LMF1.2), but in many OECD countries educational attainment has a slightly larger impact on the likelihood that a single mother will be employed than it does on the likelihood that a partnered mother will be employed (Chart LMF1.3.C). On average across OECD countries with available data, employment rates for partnered mothers vary from 41.1% for those with low educational attainment to 63.0% for those with medium education and 76.7% for those with high levels of educational attainment (Chart LMF1.3.C, panel A). For single mothers, rates vary slightly more – from 39.5% on average for those with low educational attainment to 79.4% for those with high educational attainment (Chart LMF1.3.C, panel B). In some countries, differences in the impact of education by partnership status are very large. In the Netherlands, for instance, employment rates for highly-educated partnered mothers are about 33 percentage points higher than those for partnered mothers with low levels of educational attainment, while the rate for highly-educated single mothers is almost 47 percentage points higher than the rate for single mothers with low education.

Chart LMF1.3.C. Employment rates for partnered mothers and single mothers by level of education, 2014 or latest available^a

Employment rates (%) for partnered women and single women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14^b, by level of education^c



Countries are ranked in descending order according to the employment rate for all partnered women with a least one child aged 0-14 and all single women with a least one child aged 0-14, respectively

a) Data for Finland refer to 2012, and for Germany and Turkey to 2013

b) For Canada, children aged 0-15, and for the United States children aged 0-17

c) For Canada partnership status is based on civil status: 'partnered' women are those whose civil status is 'married' or 'living in common-law', and single women are those who are 'separated', 'divorced', 'widowed' or 'single, never married'.

d) Educational attainment is measured on a three-part ordinal variable (low education, medium education and high education), with distinctions between the three levels corresponding to the usual ISCED classification system: 'low education' corresponds to a highest level of educational attainment at ISCED 2011 levels 0-2 (early-childhood education, primary or lower secondary education); 'moderate education' reflects a highest level of educational attainment at ISCED 2011 levels 3-4 (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education); and 'high education' corresponds to a highest level of educational attainment at ISCED 2011 levels 5-8 (short-cycle tertiary education, bachelor or equivalent, master or equivalent, doctoral or equivalent).

e) See note g) to Chart LMF1.3.A

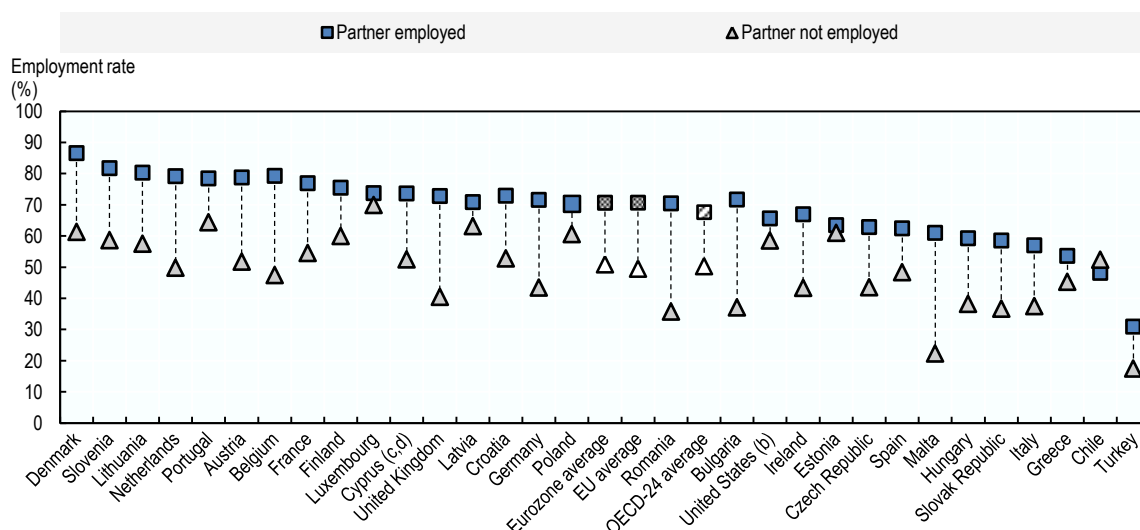
f) See note h) to Chart LMF1.3.A

Sources: [for Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey; for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey; for Turkey, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey; for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

Across the OECD, partnered mothers are more likely to be employed when their partner is also in work (Chart LMF1.3.D). On average across OECD countries, the employment rate for partnered mothers with an employed partner is 67.7%, compared to 50.3% for mothers with a partner who is not employed. This pattern holds across all countries with available data except Chile, although the extent to which employment rates vary with the partner's employment status does differ. In Estonia and Luxembourg, for example, employment rates for mothers with a partner who is not employed are only around 2-4 percentage points lower than that for a mother with an employed partner. In Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, by contrast, employment rates for partnered mothers with a non-working partner are over 25 percentage points lower than those for mothers with partner who is in employment.

Chart LMF1.3.D. Employment rates for partnered mothers by partner's employment status, 2014 or latest available^a

Employment rates (%) for partnered women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14^b, by partner's employment status



a) Data for Denmark and Finland refer to 2012, and for Germany and Turkey to 2013

b) For the United States children aged 0-17

c) see note g) for Chart LMF1.3.A

d) see note h) for Chart LMF1.3.A

Sources: [for Chile, CASEN; for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey; for Turkey, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey; for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

Comparability and data issues

Data for this indicator come from national labour force or national household surveys, or from information provided by national authorities. Labour force surveys are well-established sources of labour market data, but they are not designed specifically to provide information on employment by family, parenthood or partnership status. As a result, classifications of 'parents' and 'single' or 'partnered' mothers may not always match conventional or traditional conceptions – for example, individuals are generally only counted as single parents if they live in the same household as the child in question.

There are some small differences across countries in the age groups used to classify children. While for most countries all children aged 0-14 are considered dependent children, in Canada the age range is 0-15, in Sweden 0-18, and in the United States the 0-17. To the extent that maternal

employment rates are higher when women have a youngest child aged over 14 than when the youngest child is aged 0-14, this may lead to an overestimation of maternal employment. Moreover, to the extent that single mothers of children aged over 14 are more or less likely to be in employment than partnered mothers of children aged over 14, this may also affect international comparisons of how maternal employment rates differ by partnership status.

As discussed in indicator [LMF1.2](#), cross-national comparisons of employment among mothers may also be affected by differences in the treatment of individuals on maternity or parental leave. It is difficult to isolate the impact of differences in the treatment of persons on leave on maternal employment rates, but it is possible that different treatments could influence cross-national variations in maternal employment rates and perhaps also differences in maternal employment rates by partnership status, to the extent that the use of leave also differs by partnership status.

Further reading: OECD (2007), *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life, A Synthesis of Findings for OECD Countries*; OECD (2016), *Employment Outlook 2016*; OECD (2011), *Doing Better for Families* www.oecd.org/social/family/doingbetter; OECD (2012), *Closing the Gender Gap*