

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 and the United States, children aged 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 and the United States, children aged 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:

- iv. *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](#).

Information is presented only for women aged 15-64 with dependent children (from here on generally *mothers*), 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'.

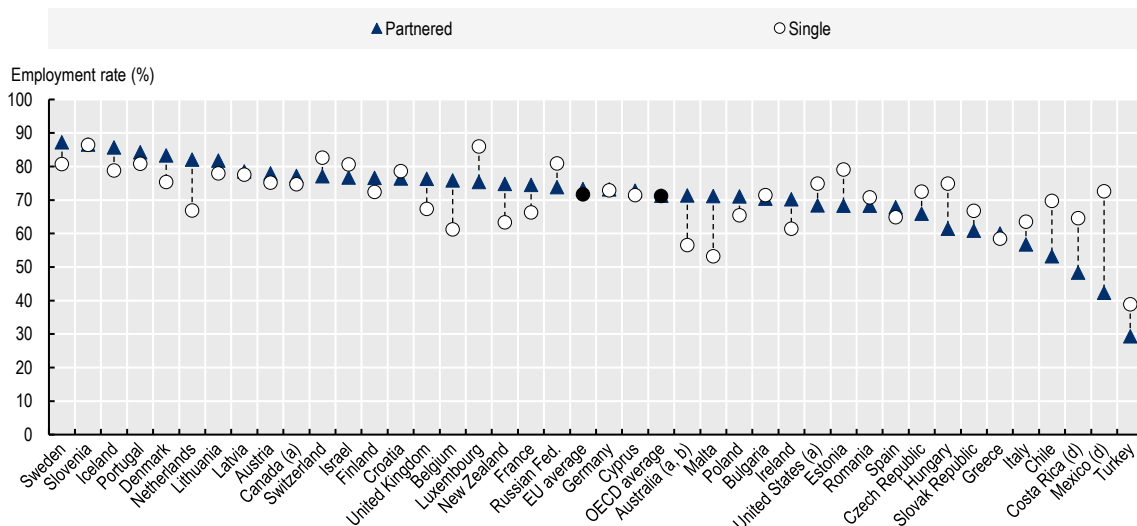
Other relevant indicators: SF1.1: Family size and composition; SF1.2: Children in families; LMF1.2: Maternal employment; LMF2.2 and LMF2.3 Usual working hours' distribution among couple and sole parents;

Key findings

Across the OECD, maternal employment rates vary distinctively with the partnership status of mothers (Chart LMF1.3.A). While for 21 OECD countries, partnered mothers are more likely to be in gainful employment, single mothers are more likely to be employed in 12 OECD countries. The absolute differences in employment rates by partnership status are larger in countries where employment of single mothers is more common than employment for partnered mothers. Overall across the OECD, there is no substantial difference in the average rate for both partnership statuses (71% and 72%, respectively). Nevertheless, single mothers are at least 10 percentage points more likely to be employed than those in partnerships in Chile, Estonia, Hungary and Luxembourg as well as more than 30 percentage points in Mexico. On the other hand, partnered mothers are at least 10 percentage points more likely to be employed in Australia, Belgium, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

Chart LMF1.3.A. Employment rates for partnered mothers and single mothers, 2019 or latest available

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



Note: For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

a. For Australia, data cover all women aged 15 and over. For Canada and the United States, children aged 0-17.

b. For Australia, women with 'at least one child aged 0-14' are those whose 'relationship in household' is classified as either 'wife or partner with children under 15' or 'lone parent with children under 15'. Data refer to June months.

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. 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.

e. 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.

f. 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";

g. 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.

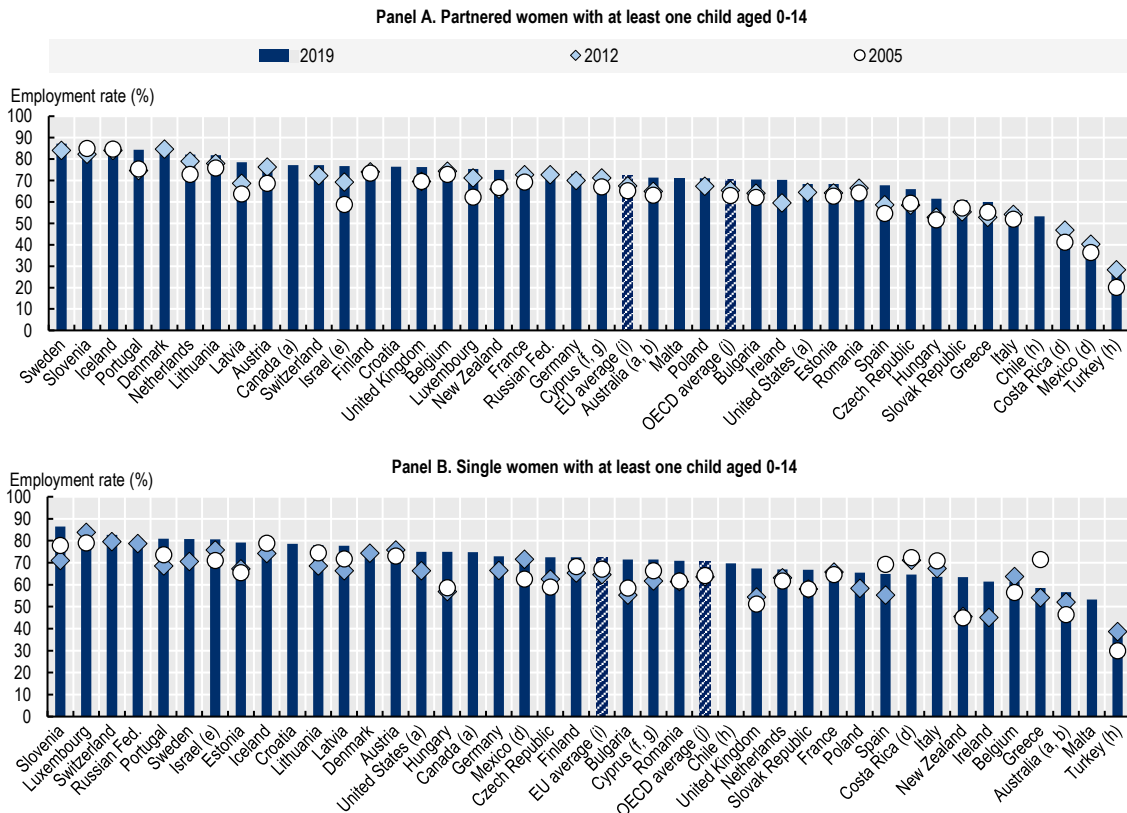
h. Data for Chile refer to 2017 and for Turkey to 2013.

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

Employment rates for both partnered and single women have generally increased since 2005 and 2012 (Chart LMF1.3.B). On average across the OECD, employment rates for partnered mothers have risen from 63% in 2005, to 65% in 2012 and 71% in 2019 (Chart LMF1.3.B, Panel A). With about 1 percentage point difference, the rate only decreased for Denmark between 2012 and 2019. For single mothers, increases have been strong between 2010 and 2019 when employment rates rose from 64% to 70%, but virtually stable between 2005 and 2012 (Chart LMF1.3.B, Panel B). Rates fell between 2012 and 2019 for three OECD countries – Austria, Belgium and Italy. In Greece, Italy and Spain, the share of employed single mothers in 2019 is smaller than in 2005.

Chart LMF1.3.B. Employment rates for partnered mothers and single mothers, 2005, 2012 and 2019 or latest available

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



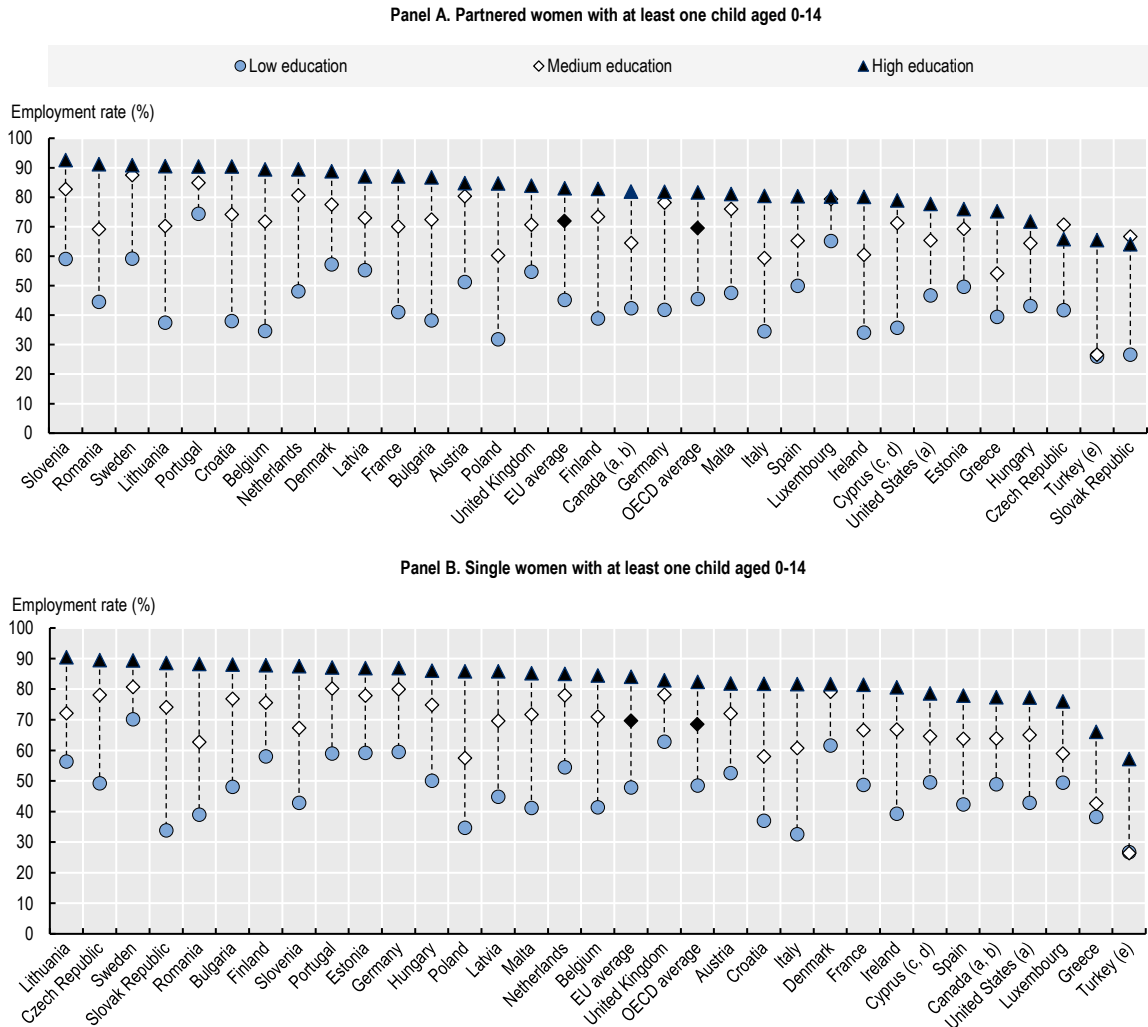
Note: For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

- a. For Australia, data cover all women aged 15 and over. For Canada and the United States, children aged 0-17.
- b. see note b. to Chart LMF1.3.A
- c. see note c. to Chart LMF1.3.A
- d. see note d. to Chart LMF1.3.A
- e. see note e. to Chart LMF1.3.A
- f. see note f. to Chart LMF1.3.A
- g. see note g. to Chart LMF1.3.A
- h. Data for Chile refer to 2017 and for Turkey to 2013.
- i. EU average refers to EU-20 average for countries with data available for all three years: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain
- j. OECD average refers to OECD-25 average for countries with data available for all three years: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Colombia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom

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

Chart LMF1.3.C. Employment rates for partnered mothers and single mothers by level of education, 2019 or latest available

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



Note: 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); '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). For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

a. For Canada and the United States, data cover children aged 0-17.

b. see note b. to Chart LMF1.3.A

c. see note f. to Chart LMF1.3.A

d. see note g. to Chart LMF1.3.A

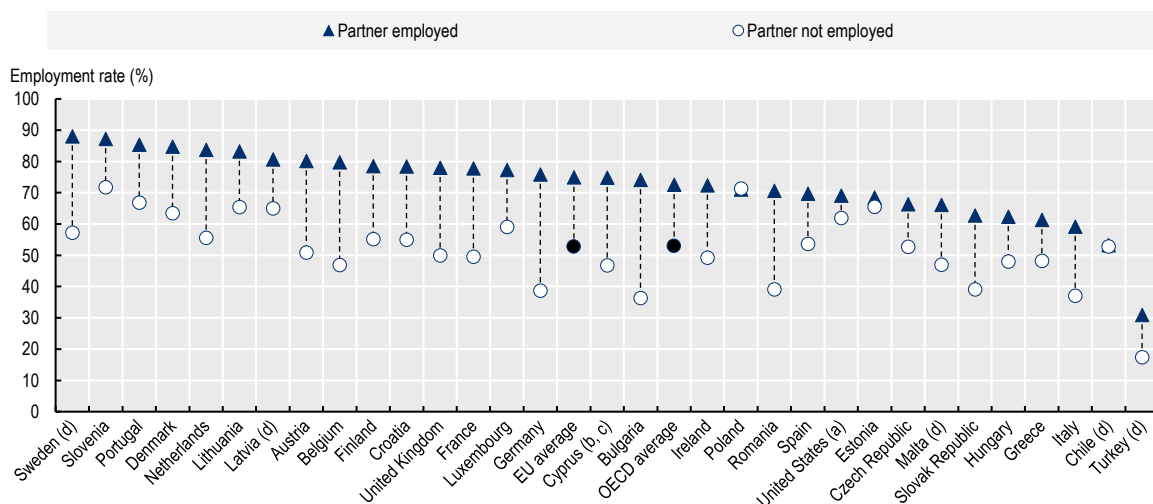
e. Data for Turkey refer to 2013.

Source: [For Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey](#); [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](#)

As pointed out in indicator [LMF1.2](#), employment rates for all mothers vary along the degree of educational attainment. On average, employment rates of partnered mothers are almost similar to the employment rates of single mothers (Chart LMF1.3.C). Across OECD countries, employment rates for partnered mothers vary from 46% for those with low educational attainment to 70% for those with medium education and 82% for those with high levels of educational attainment (Chart LMF1.3.C, panel A). For single mothers, rates vary slightly less – from 49% on average for those with low educational attainment, 69% for those with medium education to 82% 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 Belgium, Lithuania and Poland, for instance, employment rates for highly-educated partnered mothers are about 50 percentage points higher than those for partnered mothers with low levels of educational attainment. For highly-educated single mothers this is the case in Poland and the Slovak Republic.

Chart LMF1.3.D. Employment rates for partnered mothers by partner's employment status, 2019 or latest available

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



Note: For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small, especially for partnered mothers with a non-employed partner. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

a. For the United States, data cover children aged 0-17.

b. see note f. to Chart LMF1.3.A

c. see note g. to Chart LMF1.3.A

d. Data for Chile, Latvia, Malta and Sweden refer to 2017 and for Turkey to 2013.

Source: [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](#)

With a few notable exceptions that show no substantial differences – namely Chile, Estonia and Poland – partnered mothers across the OECD are more likely to be employed if their partner is employed as well. On average for OECD countries, 73% of mothers with employed partners are in paid work themselves, while 53% of mothers without employed partners are in work. At more than 30 percentage points, the largest difference between partnered mothers with and without employed partners across OECD countries can be found in Belgium, Germany and Sweden. At more than 25 percentage points, differences are also large in Austria, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

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 or parenthood status. As a result, classifications of 'parents' may not always match conventional or traditional conceptions of parenthood – for example, individuals are only counted as 'parents' if they live in the same household as the child in question – while relatively small sample sizes for certain subgroups may affect the reliability of certain results and subsequent comparisons.

Specific comparability issues arise for a few countries. In Australia, women with 'at least one child aged 0-14' are those whose 'relationship in household' is classified as either 'wife or partner with children under 15' or 'lone parent with children under 15'. Women with 'no children aged 0-14' are those with any other type of 'relationship in household'. In households that contain more than one mother (e.g. some same-sex parent households and some three-generation households), the employment status of the older mother(s) is not covered. For Mexico, data cover mothers who are reported as the head of the household or the spouse/partner of the head of the household, only. In addition, cross-national comparisons of employment among mothers may be affected by differences in the treatment of individuals on maternity or parental leave, as explained in indicator LMF1.2.

Finally, there are also some small differences in the age groups used to classify children and partnerships. While for most countries all children aged 0-14 are considered dependent children, in Canada and in the United States this ranges from 0 to 17. For Canada, the mothers 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'.

Sources and further reading:

OECD (2017), *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-en>

OECD (2020), *OECD Labour Force Statistics 2020*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5842cc7f-en>.

OECD (2020), *Labour Force Statistics In OECD Countries: Sources, Coverage And Definitions*,

http://oecd.org/els/emp/LFSNOTES_SOURCES.pdf