

LMF1.2. Maternal employment rates

Definitions and methodology

Data on employment rates for mothers are presented here through four measures:

- i. *Employment rates for women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14, by part-time/full-time employment status*, with 'children' defined as any children aged 0-14 inclusive who live in the same household as the woman and who 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 generally not included, nor are women with children aged 15 and over regardless of whether or not the child lives in the same household and/or is dependent on the mother. Exceptions to this definition are Canada, Korea and the United States, where children aged 0-17 are included. For Australia and Japan, data cover all women aged 15 and over, and for Korea married women aged 15-54. More specific exceptions to the definitions are explained in the footnotes to each figure.
- ii. *Employment rates for women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child (aged 0-14) by age of youngest child in the household*. The age groups generally used for the youngest child are 0-2, 3-5 and 6-14 years of age. However, for some specific countries these age groups differ slightly: For Canada, the age groups for the age of youngest child are 0-5 and 6-17, for Israel 0-1, 2-4 and 5-14, for Korea 0-6, 7-12 and 13-17, for the United States 0-2, 3-5 and 6-17, and for the Russian Federation 0-6, 7-10 and 11-14.
- iii. *Employment rates for women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child (aged 0-14) by number of children (aged 0-14) in the household*. Numbers of children in the household are grouped into one child, two children, and three or more children.
- iv. *Employment rates for 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).

Information is presented only for mothers aged 15-64 years old (from here on generally *mothers*), although data for 25-54 year olds only are also available for many 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'. The distinction between part-time and full-time employment generally follows the OECD's common 30-hour definition, with part-time employment defined as usual weekly working hours of less than 30 hours per week in the main job, and full-time employment as usual weekly working hours of 30 or more per week in the main job. (See *data and comparability issues* for exceptions and more detail).

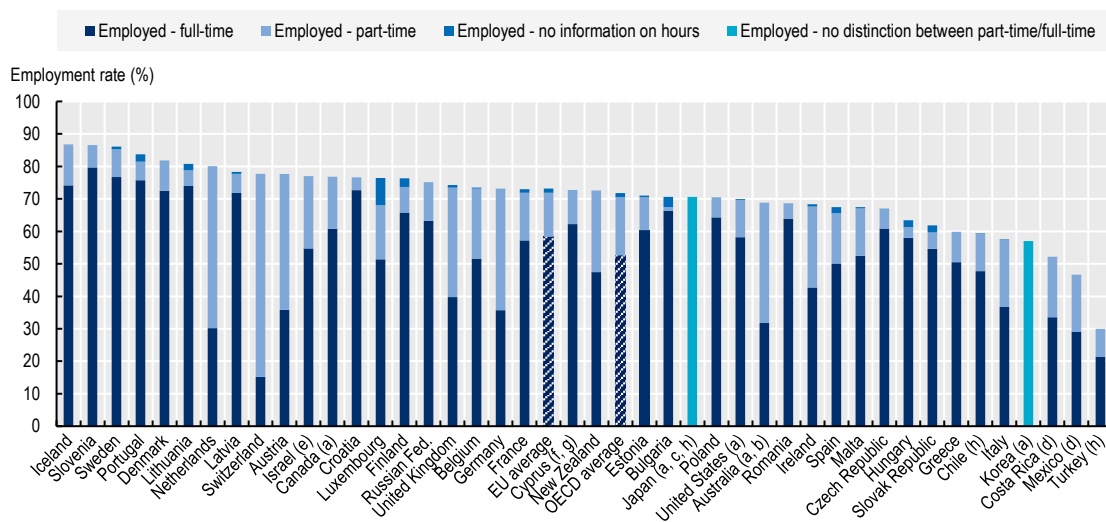
Other relevant indicators: Employment patterns over the life-course (LMF1.4); Gender pay gaps for full-time workers and earnings by educational attainment (LMF1.5); Gender differences in employment outcomes (LMF1.6); Distribution of working hours among couple and sole parents families (LMF2.2 and LMF2.3).

Key findings

On average across the OECD, 71% of mothers were employed in 2019, but employment rates differ considerably between member countries (Chart LMF1.2.A). With more than 85% of mothers employed, the highest rates are found in Iceland, Slovenia and Sweden and in 12 other OECD countries more than 75% of mothers were in paid work (Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland). At the other end of the spectrum, the rate is below 60% in 6 OECD countries (Chile, Greece, Italy, Korea, Mexico, and Turkey), with particularly low rates for Mexico (47%) and Turkey (30%).

Chart LMF1.2.A Maternal employment rates, 2019 or latest available year

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



Note: Part-time employment is defined as usual weekly working hours of less than 30 hours per week in the main job, and full-time employment as usual weekly working hours of 30 or more per week in the main job. Exact definitions differ for some countries. For Australia, part-time employees are those who usually work less than 35 hours a week (in all jobs) and either did so during the reference week, or were not at work in the reference week; for Chile and Costa Rica, the distinction between part-time and full-time work is based on actual hours worked in the main job in the previous week, rather than usual weekly working hours in the main job; for Israel, part-time is defined as actual working hours of less than 35 hours during the survey reference week; for Mexico, part-time employment is defined as weekly working hours of less than 35 hours per week; for Switzerland, part-time work is defined on the basis of the respondent's own perception of their main job. However, average weekly hours at 90% or more of the occupational standard are considered full-time. In some countries (those for which information comes from the EU-LFS, plus the United States) it is possible for individuals to report that they do not have usual set hours in their main job. Where this is the case, the individual's actual hours worked in their main job during the survey reference week are used in place of their usual weekly working hours. For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

a. For Australia and Japan, data cover all women aged 15 and over, and for Korea married women aged 15-54. For Canada, Korea 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'. Women with 'no children aged 0-14' are those with any other type of 'relationship in household'. Data refer to June months.

c. For Japan, data refer to the employment status of the (youngest) mother in households with a mother and a youngest child in the given age group, rather than to mothers as individuals. 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.

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.

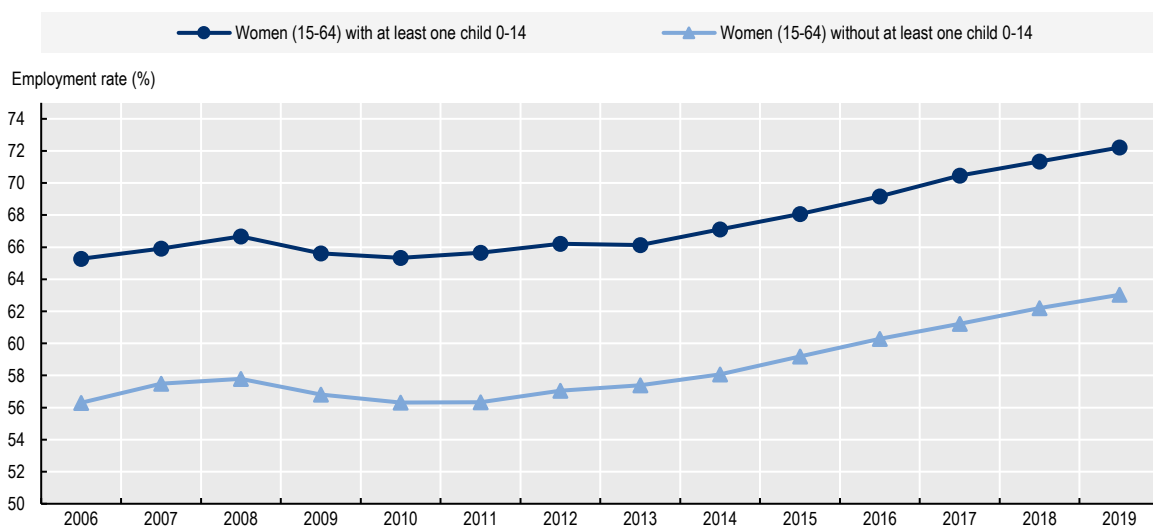
h. Data for Japan refer to 2018, for Chile to 2017 and for Turkey to 2013.

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 Japan, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions](#); [for Korea, Korean Local Area Labour Force Survey](#); [for Turkey, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey](#); [for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

With 53% of all mothers in OECD countries, most work in full-time arrangements, while 18% are in part-time work. Just like the overall employment rates, the distribution of the part-time/full-time status differs widely across countries. Part-time work is particularly common in Austria, Australia, Germany, and the Netherlands, where more than half of all employed mothers do not work full-time. While Switzerland also records high levels of part-time work, the data here is based on the respondents on perception of their main job and thus needs to be treated with caution. On the other end, 9 OECD countries have less than 10% of employed mothers working in part-time arrangements (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Sweden).

Chart LMF1.2.B. Trends in maternal employment rates, 2006 to 2019

OECD-24 unweighted average employment rate (%) for women (15-64 year-olds) with at least one child aged 0-14 and without any children aged 0-14



Note: Unweighted average of the 24 OECD countries for which comparable data are available between 2006 and 2016. These 24 countries are: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States^a.

a. For the United States children aged 0-17.

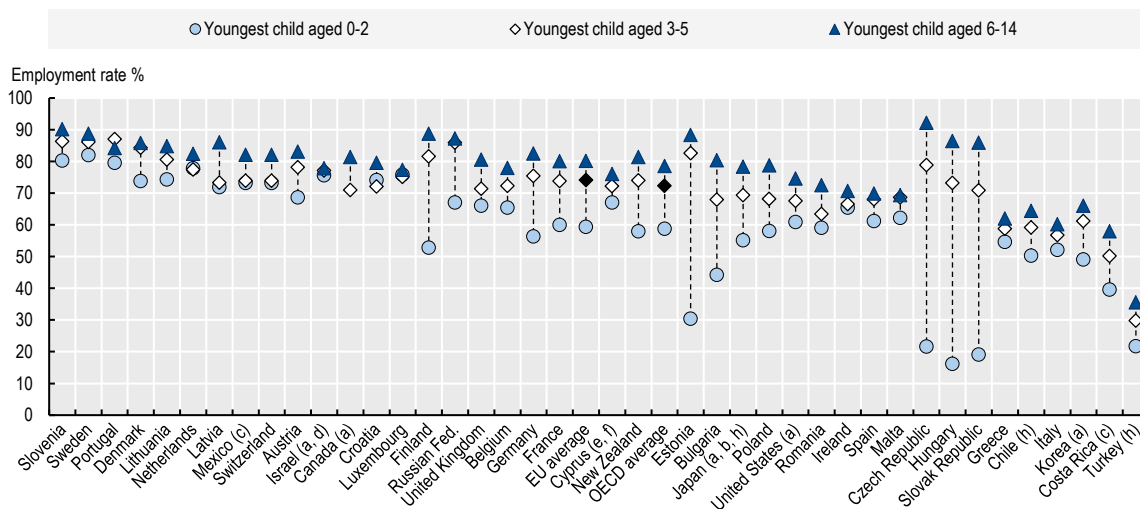
Source: [For Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey](#); for Iceland, Israel, New Zealand, and Mexico, OECD questionnaire; [for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey](#); [for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#).

Maternal employment rates have grown in recent years (Chart LMF1.2.B). After previous increases, maternal employment rates fell slightly following the start of the global financial and economic crisis in 2008, but generally returned to pre-crisis levels by 2014. Since then, the maternal employment rates have seen stronger increases, such that the OECD-24 unweighted average reached 72% in 2019, compared to 67% in 2008. Similar increases, albeit from a slightly lower level, have been observed for women without children aged 0-14, reaching 63% in 2019 relative to 58% in 2008. These parallel trends in the OECD-24 average employment rate for women with and without children aged 0-14, suggests that changes in employment rates for women with children have been driven largely by trends in employment for women generally, rather than the employment environment for mothers specifically.

Often maternal employment rates increase with the age of the mother's youngest child across the OECD (Chart LMF1.2.C). In almost all countries, employment rates are lower for mothers whose youngest child is aged between 0 and 2 than they are for mothers whose youngest child is between 3 and 5 and particularly between 6 and 14, although the size of the gap varies across countries. In some OECD countries (e.g. Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland), differences by the age of the youngest child are relatively small (less than 10 percentage points). In others, they are very large. In Hungary, for example, the employment rate for mothers with a youngest child aged 0-2 was 16% in 2019, while mothers with the youngest children aged 3-5 and 6-14 have employment rates of 73% and 87%, respectively. Similarly, large differences (almost 30 percentage points or more) across the youngest age groups can be found in the Czech Republic, Estonia, and the Slovak Republic as well as to a slightly lesser extent in Finland.

Chart LMF1.2.C. Maternal employment rates by age of youngest child, 2019 or latest available year

Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 year-olds) with children (0-14 year-olds) by age of the youngest child



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

a. For Japan, data cover all women aged 15 and over, and for Korea married women aged 15-54. For Canada, Korea and the United States, data refer to women with children aged 0-17. For Canada, the age groups for the age of youngest child are 0-5 and 6-17, for Israel 0-1, 2-4 and 5-14, for Korea 0-6, 7-12 and 13-17, for the United States 0-2, 3-5 and 6-17, and for the Russian Federation 0-6, 7-10 and 11-14.

b. see note c. to Chart LMF 1.2.A

c. see note d. to Chart LMF 1.2.A

d. see note e. to Chart LMF 1.2.A

e. see note f. to Chart LMF 1.2.A

f. see note g. to Chart LMF 1.2.A

h. Data for Japan refer to 2018, for Chile to 2017 and for Turkey to 2013.

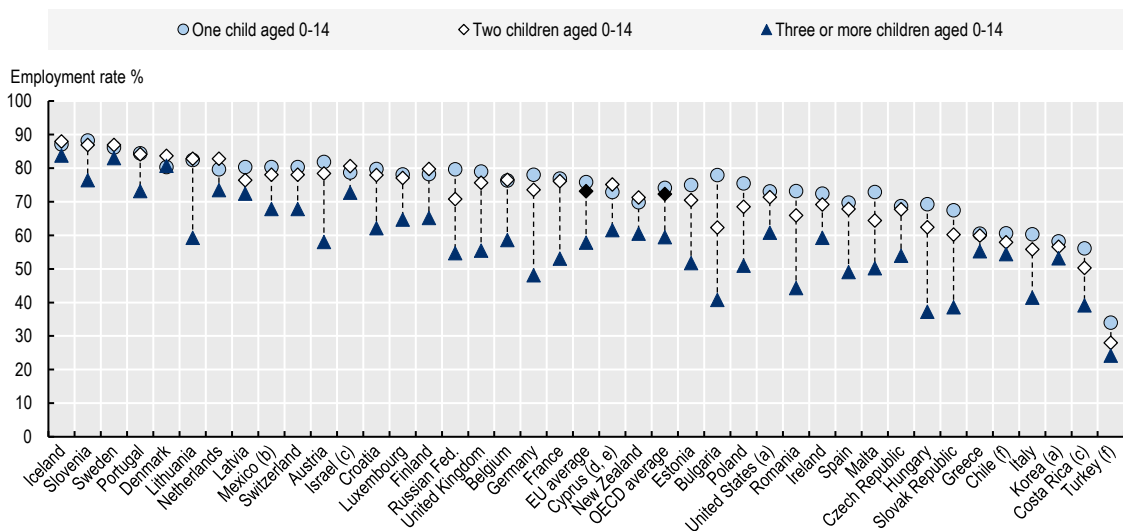
Source: [For Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey](#); [for Chile, CASEN](#); for Costa Rica, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, and Switzerland, OECD questionnaire; [for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey](#); [for Japan, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions](#); [for Korea, Korean Local Area Labour Force Survey](#); [for Turkey, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey](#); [for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

International comparisons of employment among mothers with very young children are complicated by cross-national differences in the treatment of parents on parental leave. For example, unlike Sweden, Estonia does not count all parents on parental leave as “in employment”, which contributes to the relatively low employment rate among mothers with a youngest child aged 0-2 (see data and comparability issues for more detail and discussion).

Maternal employment rates also generally vary with the number of children living in the household (Chart LMF1.2.D). In most countries and on average across the OECD, employment rates for mothers decrease as the number of children increases. About 74% of mothers with one child were in paid work in 2019, whereas 72% and 60% of women with two or three and more children were employed, respectively. In contrast, in Chile, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Korea and Sweden there is no significant difference in employment rates between mothers with one or more children. At more than 25 percentage points, the largest differences in employment rates of mothers with one dependent child and those with three or more dependent children can be found in Germany, Hungary and the Slovak Republic.

Chart LMF1.2.D. Maternal employment rates by number of children, 2019 or latest available year

Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 year-olds) with children (0-14 year-olds) by number of children 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 Korea married women aged 15-54. For Canada, Korea and the United States, data refer to women with children aged 0-17. For Canada, the age groups for the age of youngest child are 0-5 and 6-17, for Israel 0-1, 2-4 and 5-14, for Korea 0-6, 7-12 and 13-17, for the United States 0-2, 3-5 and 6-17, and for the Russian Federation 0-6, 7-10 and 11-14.

b. see note d. to Chart LMF 1.2.A

c. see note e. to Chart LMF 1.2.A

d. see note f. to Chart LMF 1.2.A

e. see note g. to Chart LMF 1.2.A

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

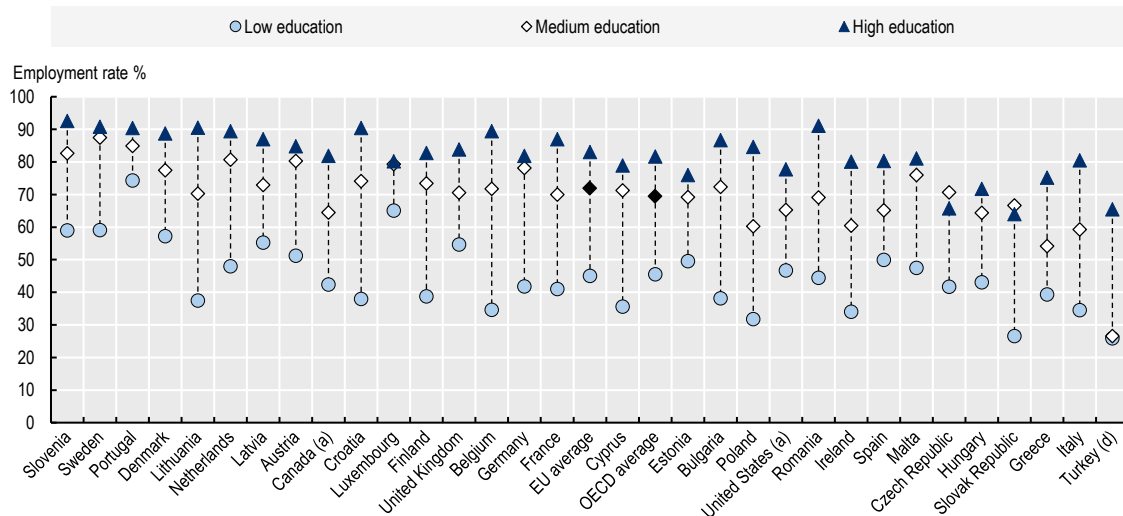
Source: [For Chile, CASEN](#); for Costa Rica, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, and Switzerland, OECD questionnaire; [for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey](#); [for Korea, Korean Local Area Labour Force Survey](#); [for Turkey, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey](#); [for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

The level of educational attainment is an important driver of maternal employment rates across the OECD - mothers are far more likely to be employed if they have a high level of educational attainment than if they have a medium or a low level of educational attainment (Chart LMF1.5.E). On average, highly educated mothers have an employment rate of 82% across the OECD. On the other hand, 70% of mothers with medium and 46% of those with low levels of educational attainment were in paid work in 2019.

The largest gaps between mothers of low and high educational background – more than 50 percentage point's difference are recorded for Belgium, Lithuania and Poland, while gaps are relatively small – below 20 percentage points - in Luxembourg and Portugal. In Turkey, there is no real differences between mothers with low and medium educational attainment as both fall to the lowest level in the OECD (about 26%).

Chart LMF1.2.E. Maternal employment rates by level of education, 2019 or latest available year

Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 year-olds) with children (0-14 year-olds) 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 refer to children aged 0-17.

b. see note f. to Chart LMF1.2.A

c. see note g. to Chart LMF1.2.A

d. Data for Turkey refer to 2013.

Source: [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](#)

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.

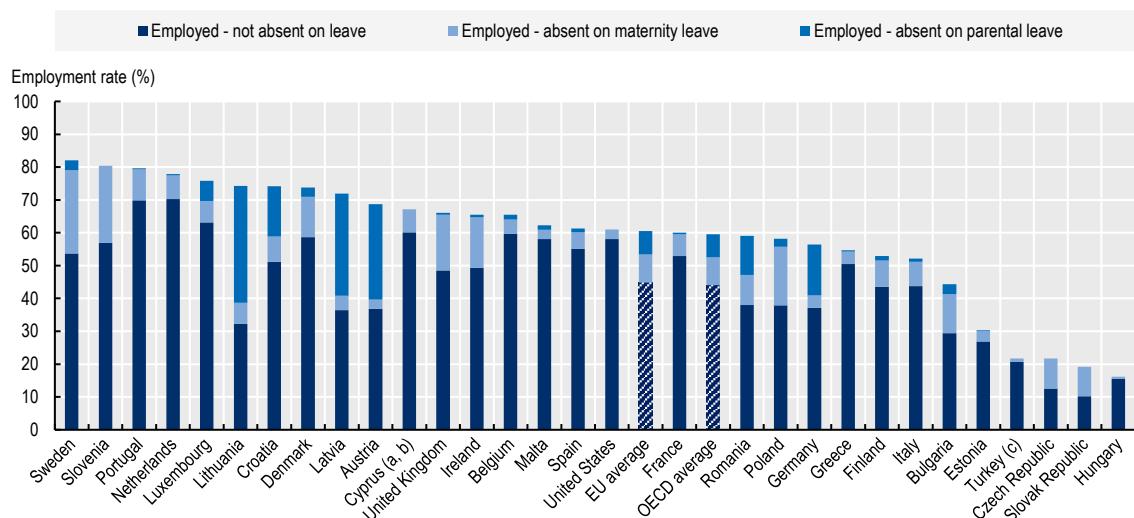
Specific comparability issues arise for a few countries. In Australia, women with 'at least one child aged 0-14' are those whose 'relationship in household' is classified as either 'wife or partner with children under 15' or 'lone parent with children under 15'. Women with 'no children aged 0-14' are those with any other type of 'relationship in household'. For Japan, data refer to the employment status of the (youngest) mother in households with a mother and a youngest child in the given age group, rather than to mothers as individuals. In households that contain more than one mother (e.g. some same-sex parent households and some three-generation households), only the employment status of the youngest mother(s) is counted. 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.

In addition, cross-national comparisons of employment among mothers may be affected by differences in the treatment of individuals on maternity or parental leave. In principle, many individuals on statutory

maternity or paid parental leave (legal or contractual) should be counted as employed. The majority of OECD countries follow ILO guidelines, which state that all those on full-time statutory (legal or contractual) maternity and/or parental leave should be counted as employed if they either expect to be on leave for a period of less than three months, or continue to receive at least 50 percent of their wage and salary while on leave. Some countries, however, use their own specific rules. In Sweden, for example, all parents on parental leave are counted as employed regardless of the length of the leave, as long as they have a (regular) job to return to. For a summary overview on how different countries treat workers on maternity/parental leave, see http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/LFSNOTES_SOURCES.pdf.

Chart LMF1.2.F. Employment rates for women with children aged 0-2, by maternity/parental leave status, 2019 or latest available year

Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 year-olds) with at least one child aged 0-2, by maternity/parental leave status



Note: Different countries treat workers on maternity/parental leave in different ways. Many follow ILO guidelines, with all workers absent on full-time maternity leave counted as employed but absent, and those on full-time parental leave treated in the same way as any other case of long-term absence from work (that is, they should be considered as employed but absent if the period of absence is less than 3 months or if they receive at least 50% of their wage or salary from their employer). Others use their own country-specific rules. As a result, the proportion of women with at least one child aged 0-2 that are employed but absent from work on maternity/parental leave does not necessarily reflect maternity/parental leave usage rates. For a summary overview of how different countries treat workers on maternity/parental leave, see: http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/LFSNOTES_SOURCES.pdf. For Turkey and the United States, no distinction between maternity and parental leave (in the former the only option available in the survey is 'maternity leave', and in the latter 'maternity/parental leave'). For European countries based on the EU-LFS, maternity and parental leave considered together prior to 2006. For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

a. see note e. to Chart LMF1.2.A

b. see note f. to Chart LMF1.2.A

c. Data for Turkey refer to 2013.

Source: 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 LMF1.2.F. shows the distribution of employment rates for mothers of very young children (aged 0-2) by maternity/parental leave status. The data show sizable variation, which needs to be considered when thinking about employment rates for recent mothers. While on average 60% of recent mothers (youngest child aged 0-2) are employed across the OECD, only 44% are employed and not absent on leave. Absence on maternity leave (9%) accounts for slightly more of this difference than absence on parental leave (7%).

Finally, there are also some small differences in the age groups used to classify children. 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. 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. Similarly, while for most countries children can be disaggregated into those aged 0-2, 3-5 and 6-14, for Canada, Israel, the United States and the Russian Federation the age groups are, respectively: 0-2, 3-5 and 6-15; 0-1, 2-4 and 5-14; and 0-2, 3-5 and 6-17; and 0-6, 7-10 and 11-14. Again, to the extent that maternal employment rates vary by the age of children, the use of these different age groups may influence the estimates shown in Chart LMF1.2.C for these four countries.

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