

## LMF1.2: Maternal employment rates

### *Definitions and methodology*

Data on employment rates for mothers are presented here through three main and related measures:

- i. *Employment rates for women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14, by part-time/full-time status*, 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 generally 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 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, although these differ slightly for certain specific countries.
- 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.

Employment rates for mothers are also presented by education level and by migration background:

- 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).
- v. *Employment rates for women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child (aged 0-14) by country of birth*. For simplicity, women’s countries of birth are group into ‘born in country of residence’ (i.e. the woman was born in the country in which they are resident) and ‘born outside of the country of residence’ (i.e. the woman was born in a country other than that in which they are resident).

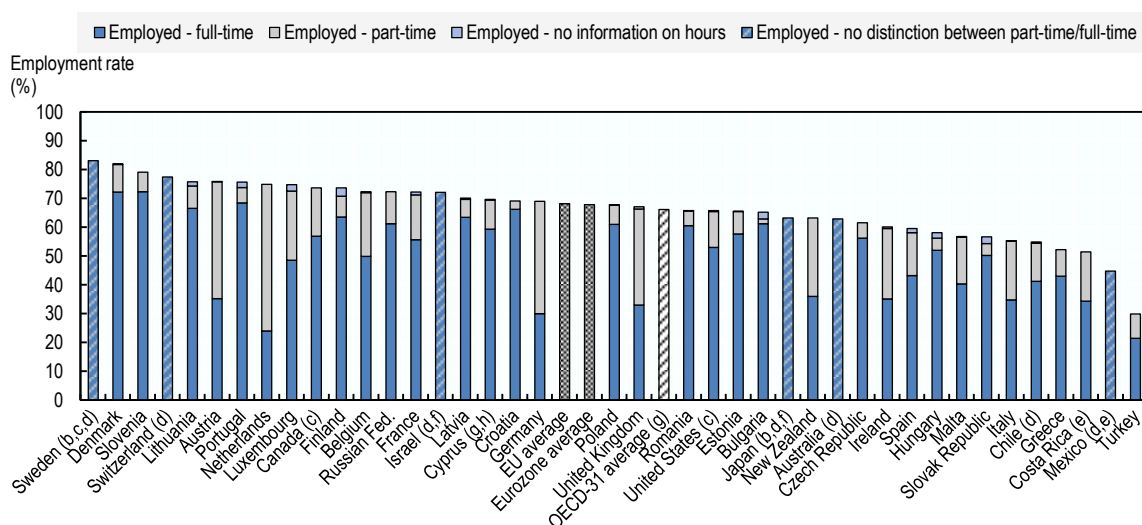
Information is presented only for mothers aged 15-64 years old, although data for 25-54 year olds only are also available for many countries in the [associated .xls file](#). Definitions of ‘employment’ follow [ILO guidelines](#) – with all people who during a specified reference period were either in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

On average across OECD countries around 66% of mothers with children aged 0-14 are in employment (Chart LMF1.2.A), but rates differ considerably across countries. In six OECD countries (Austria, Denmark, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland) more than 75% of mothers with children aged 0-14 are in work, with rates particularly high – at around 82-83% – in Denmark and Sweden. By contrast, in eight other OECD countries (Chile, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, the Slovak Republic, Spain, and Turkey) employment rates for mothers with children aged 0-14 are less than 60%. In Turkey, less than a third of all mothers with children aged 0-14 are in employment.

**Chart LMF1.2.A Maternal employment rates, 2014 or latest available year<sup>a</sup>**  
 Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 year olds<sup>b</sup>) with at least one child aged 0-14<sup>c</sup>, by part-time/full-time status<sup>d</sup>



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

b) For Japan, all ages, and 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) 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. 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 Chile, 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. No distinction between part-time and full-time employment in Australia, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Sweden and Switzerland.

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) For Japan, data refer to the employment status of the mother in households with a mother and at least one child aged 0-14, rather than to mothers themselves.

g) The OECD-31 average excludes Japan

h) 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.

i) 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";

j) 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.

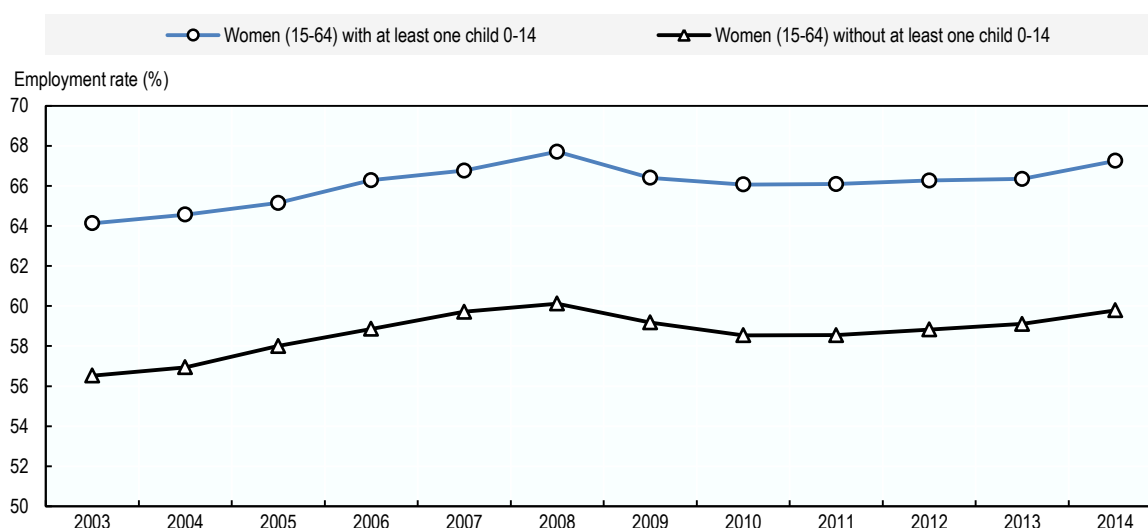
Sources: for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics; for Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey; for Chile, CASEN; for Costa Rica, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland and the Russian Federation, OECD questionnaire; for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey; for Japan, Ministry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

In most OECD countries, most employed mothers work full-time (Chart LMF1.2.A). In many, somewhere between 70% and 90% of employed mothers work full-time hours, and in some (the Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, and Slovenia) over 90% are in full-time work. However, in a few OECD countries (Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) a majority of employed mothers work part-time. In the Netherlands, more than two-thirds of all employed mothers work part-time hours.

Maternal employment rates fell slightly following the start of the economic crisis in 2008, and in many cases have still not yet quite returned to pre-crisis levels. Chart LMF1.2.B, for example, shows the OECD-18 unweighted average employment rate for women with children aged 0-14 and women without any children aged 0-14 for the years between 2003 and 2014. The OECD-18 average rate was increasing steadily prior to 2008, but following the onset of the crisis dropped by almost two percentage points – from 67.7% to 66.1% – between 2008 and 2010. The OECD-18 average rate stabilised over the following years and increased by almost one percentage point between 2013 and 2014 but, at 67.3%, still remains slightly lower than in 2008. Trends in the OECD-18 average employment rate for women without any children aged 0-14 are similar (Chart LMF1.2.B), suggesting 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.

**Chart LMF1.2.B. Trends in maternal employment rates, 2003 to 2014**

OECD-18 unweighted average<sup>a</sup> employment rate (%) for women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14<sup>b</sup> and without any children aged 0-14<sup>b</sup>



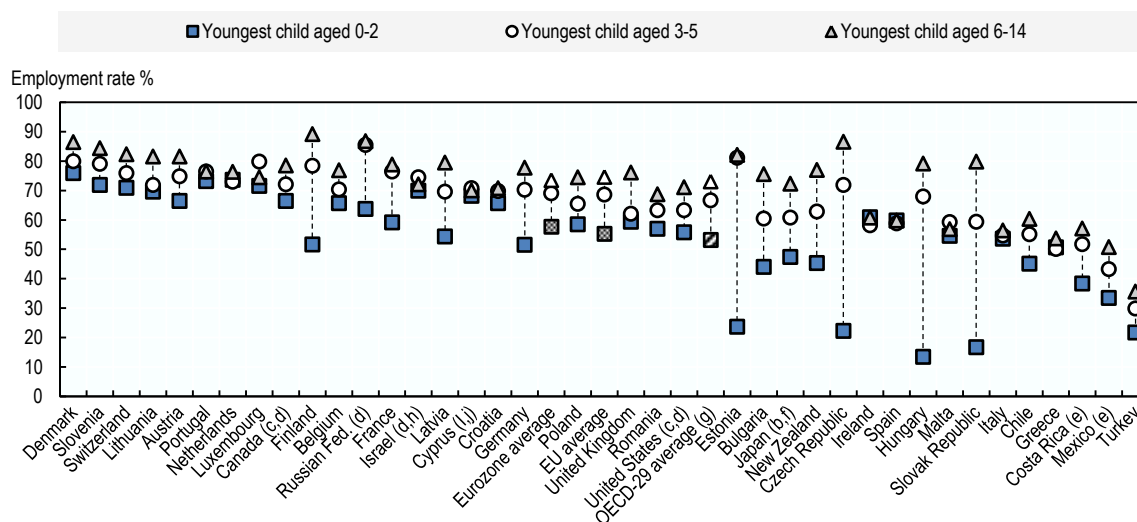
a) Unweighted average of the 18 OECD countries for which data are available between 2003 and 2014. These 18 countries are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States

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

Sources: for Canada, [Canadian Labour Force Survey](#); for Chile, [CASEN](#); For New Zealand, Switzerland, OECD questionnaire; for European countries, [European Union Labour Force Survey](#); for the United States, [U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

In many OECD countries, maternal employment increases with the age of the mother's youngest child (Chart LMF1.2.C). Generally, 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 does vary across countries. In some OECD countries (e.g. Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain), differences by the age of the youngest child are only relatively small. In others, they are very large. In Finland, for example, the employment rate for mothers with a youngest child aged 0-2 is just less than 38 percentage points lower than the rate for mothers with a youngest child aged 6-14. In the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the Slovak Republic, the difference is over 60 percentage points. It should be noted, though, that cross-national comparisons of employment among mothers with very young children in particular are complicated by cross-national differences in the treatment of parents on parental leave – for example, unlike most other countries, Estonia treats *all* parents on parental leave as economically inactive, which may contribute 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).

**Chart LMF1.2.C. Maternal employment rates by age of youngest child, 2014 or latest available year<sup>a</sup>**  
 Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 years old<sup>b</sup>) with children (aged 0-14<sup>c</sup>) by age of the youngest child<sup>d</sup>

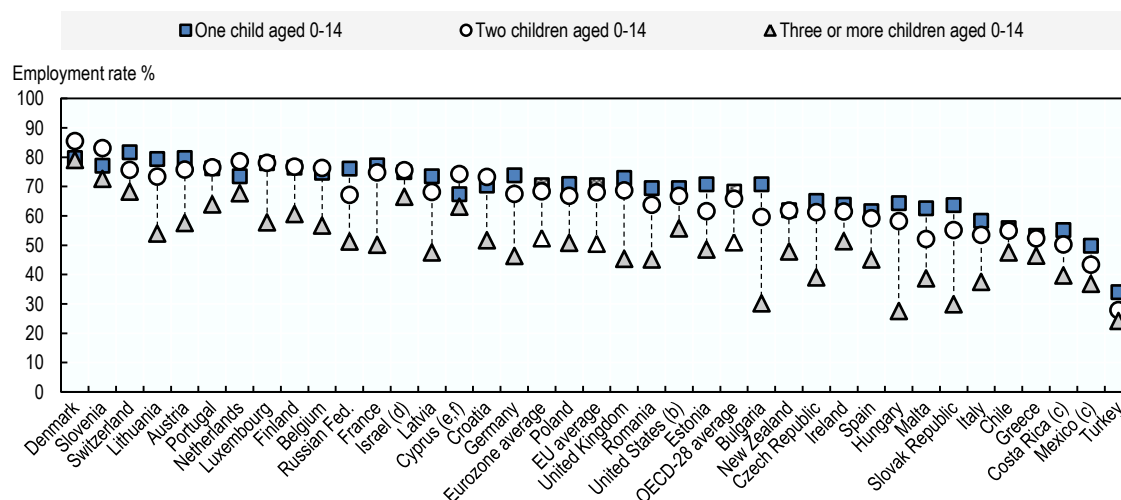


- a) Data for Denmark and Finland refer to 2012, and for Chile, Germany, and Turkey to 2013
- b) For Japan, all ages
- c) For Canada children aged 0-15, and for the United States children aged 0-17
- d) For Canada the age groups are 0-2, 3-5 and 6-15, for Israel 0-1, 2-4 and 5-14, for the United States 0-2, 3-5 and 6-17, and for the Russian Federation 0-6, 7-10 and 11-14.
- 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) For Japan, data refer to the employment status of the mother in households with a mother and a youngest child in the given age group, rather than to mothers themselves.
- g) The OECD-29 average excludes Japan
- h) See note h) in chart LMF1.2.A
- i) See note i) in chart LMF1.2.A
- j) See note j) in chart LMF1.2.A

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

Maternal employment rates also tend to vary with the number of children living in the household (Chart LMF1.2.D). In most countries, employment rates for mothers decrease as the number of children increases, with the decline particularly large once the mother has three or more children aged 0-14 – on average across OECD countries, employment rates for mothers with two children are 2.4 percentage points lower than those for mothers with only one child, but the average rate for mothers with three or more children aged 0-14 is around 15 percentage points lower than the average for mothers with two children. In some countries (e.g. Denmark, Slovenia) differences by numbers of children are only small. In others, however, the decline in the employment rate once mothers have three or more children is large – in the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Latvia, the Slovak Republic and the United Kingdom, employment rates for women with three or more children aged 0-14 are over 25 percentage points lower than those for women with only one child aged 0-14. In Hungary, the gap is over 35 percentage points.

**Chart LMF1.2.D. Maternal employment rates by number of children, 2014 or latest available year<sup>a</sup>**  
 Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 years old) with children (aged 0-14<sup>b</sup>) by number of children aged 0-14<sup>b</sup>



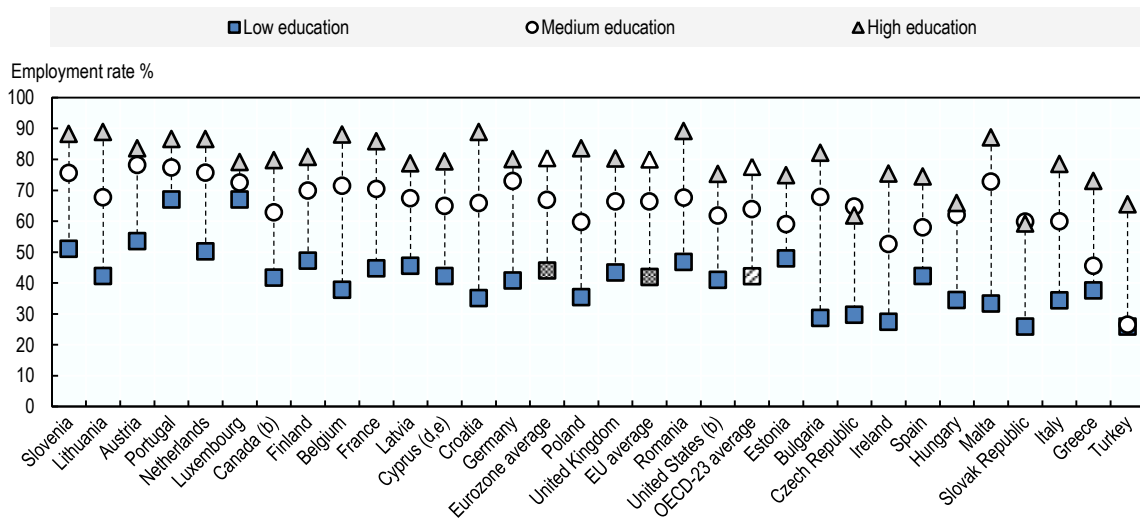
a) Data for Denmark and Finland refer to 2012, and for Chile, Germany, and Turkey to 2013  
 b) For the United States, children aged 0-17.  
 c) For Costa Rica and Mexico, data cover mothers who are reported as the head of the household or the spouse/partner of the head of the household, only.  
 d) see note h) in chart LMF1.2.A  
 e) see note i) in chart LMF1.2.A  
 f) see note j) in chart LMF1.2.A

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

Across OECD countries, 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, employment rates among highly-educated mothers are, at 77.6%, almost 14 percentage points higher than those for mothers with ‘medium education’ (63.9%, on average) and over 35 percentage points higher than those for mothers with ‘low education’ (42.2%, on average). The smallest gap between mothers with high and with low levels of educational attainment is in Luxembourg, but even there the employment rate for highly-educated mothers remains, at 79.1%, over 12 percentage points higher than that for mothers with ‘low education’ (67.0%). In Belgium and in Poland – the countries with the two largest gaps – employment rates for mothers with ‘high education’ (88.0% and 83.5%, respectively) are around 50 percentage points higher than those for mothers with only low levels of educational attainment (37.7% and 35.4%, respectively).

Mothers are generally less likely to be employed if they have a migrant background (Chart LMF1.5.F). On average across OECD countries with available data, around 54.2% of mothers who were born abroad are employed, compared to 68.2% for mothers who were born in the country of residence. In some countries (e.g. Hungary, Portugal, and the Slovak Republic) the gap is relatively small, and in Chile and Turkey mothers who were born abroad are actually more likely to be employed than those who were born inside the country. However, in other countries the difference in the likelihood of employment is considerable. In Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and Slovenia, the employment rate for mothers born abroad is at least 25 percentage points lower than the rate for mothers who were born in their country of residence. In Belgium, the gap is almost 35 percentage points.

**Chart LMF1.2.E. Maternal employment rates by level of education, 2014 or latest available year<sup>a</sup>**  
 Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 years old) with children (aged 0-14<sup>b</sup>) by level of education<sup>c</sup>



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

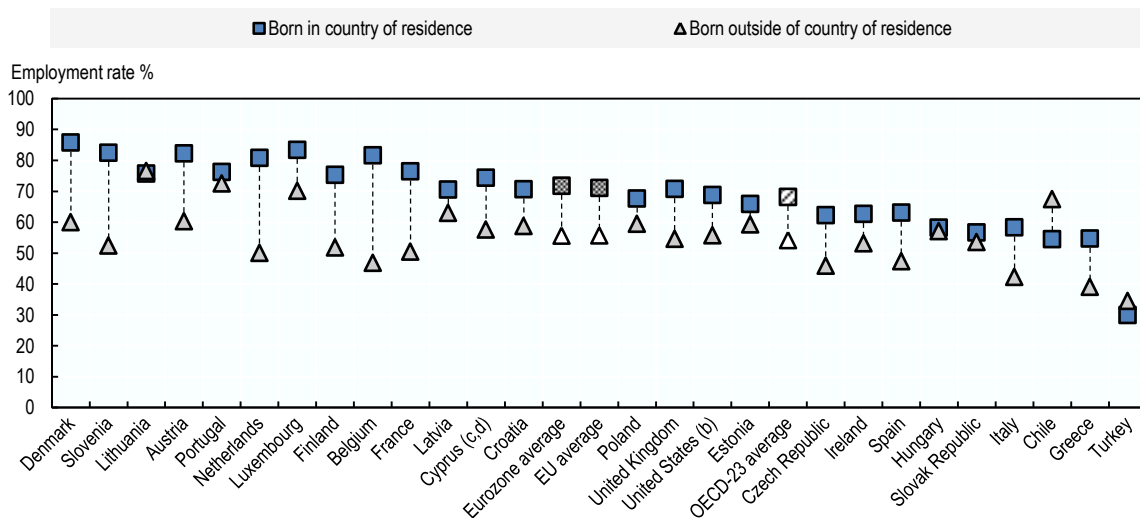
c) Educational attainment is measured on a three-part ordinal variable (low education, medium education and high education), with distinctions between the three levels corresponding to the usual ISCED classification system: 'low education' corresponds to a highest level of educational attainment at ISCED 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).

d) see note i) in chart LMF1.2.A

e) see note j) in chart LMF1.2.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](#)

**Chart LMF1.2.F. Maternal employment rates by migrant background, 2014 or latest available year<sup>a</sup>**  
 Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 years old) with children (aged 0-14<sup>b</sup>) by country of birth



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

b) For the United States children aged 0-17

c) see note i) in chart LMF1.2.A

d) see note j) in chart LMF1.2.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](#)



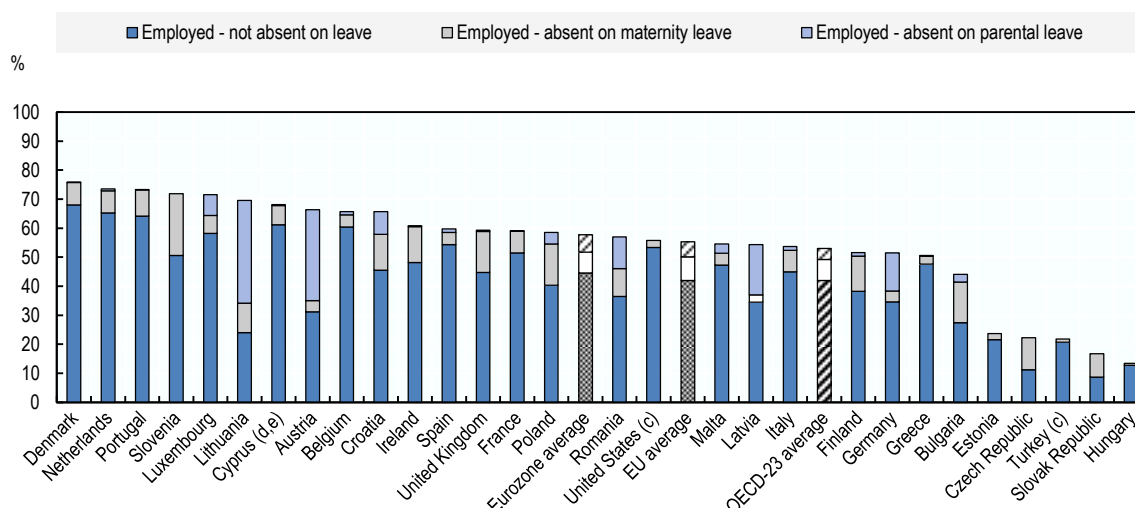
### Comparability and data issues

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 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.

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, paternity or paid parental leave (legal or contractual) should be counted as employed. ILO guidelines stipulate that people with a job and on maternity leave should always be considered as employed (but absent), while those on full-time parental leave should be treated in a similar manner to employees absent for any other reason: they should be considered as employed if the period of absence is less than 3 months or if they continue to receive at least 50% of their previous wage or salary from their employer. However, national treatment of parents on maternity and particularly parental leave varies widely. For example, in Ireland all parents on maternity or parental leave are counted as employed regardless of the duration of the leave as long as they remain attached to a job. By contrast, in Estonia all parents on parental leave are considered inactive. In New Zealand there are no specific rules on how to treat parents on maternity or parental leave, so it is up to the individual respondent to define whether or not they are in employment. (For a summary overview of how different countries treat workers on maternity/parental leave, see: [http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/LFSNOTES\\_SOURCES.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/LFSNOTES_SOURCES.pdf)).

**Chart LMF1.2.G. Employment rates for women with children aged 0-2, by maternity/parental leave status, 2014 or latest available year<sup>a</sup>**

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



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

b) 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](http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/LFSNOTES_SOURCES.pdf)

c) For Turkey and the United States, no distinction between maternity and parental leave

d) see note i) in chart LMF1.2.A

e) see note j) in chart LMF1.2.A

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

Lastly, 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 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. 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 (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](http://www.oecd.org/social/family/doingbetter); OECD (2012) *Closing the Gender Gap*