

### Definition and measurement

In all OECD countries, mothers confront obstacles when they try to reconcile their family responsibility and a paid job. To illustrate the extent of these obstacles, this section presents measures of the employment rates of mothers according to the number of children that they have (one child and two or more children) and the age of their children (less than 3, from 3 to 6, and 6 to 14) relative to those of childless women. Women employed include those working part-time, and the data are not expressed on a “full-time equivalent” basis.

Data on employment rates are taken from national labour force surveys and generally refer to the year 2003. The data presented in this section refer to women who are classified as “employed” (which includes those on maternity and other short-term leave) rather than to those counted as “being at work” (i.e. those declaring they have worked for at least one hour during the reference week of the survey). The difference between the two measures of employment rates may be especially large in countries with long-term parental leave arrangements, such as Austria, Finland and Sweden.

Employment rates of women have increased in almost all countries over the last ten years: in 2003, they ranged from less than 30% in Turkey to above 80% in Iceland. Maternal employment rates are, however, generally well below those of women without children, especially for mothers with two or more children (aged 14 or less). On average, across OECD countries, the difference in employment rates is around 4 points in the case of mothers with one child (Figure SS3.1) and 13 points for women with two or more children (Figure SS3.2). Differences across countries are large. In seven countries (including Denmark, Portugal and France), employment rates of mothers with one child are higher than those of childless women (Figure SS3.1), while differences in employment rates between the two groups of women are also marginal in Sweden and Canada. In the case of mothers with two or more children, however, their employment rates are similar (or higher) than those of childless women only in Portugal and Sweden. The gap in the employment rate of mothers is especially large in Ireland, New Zealand and the Czech Republic in the case of mother with only one child (with a gap of around 15 points); and in the same countries plus Hungary and Germany in the case of two or more children (with gaps above 20 points).

Employment rates of mothers also depend on the age of their youngest child (Table SS3.3). On average, mothers are more likely to have a paid job when children get older. In New Zealand, the Czech Republic and Finland employment rates of mothers with a youngest child aged 3 to 5 exceed those of mothers with a youngest child aged less than 3 by 15 points or more. In the same countries, employment rates of mothers with a youngest child aged 6 to 14 exceed those of mothers with a

youngest child aged less than 3 by more than 30 points.

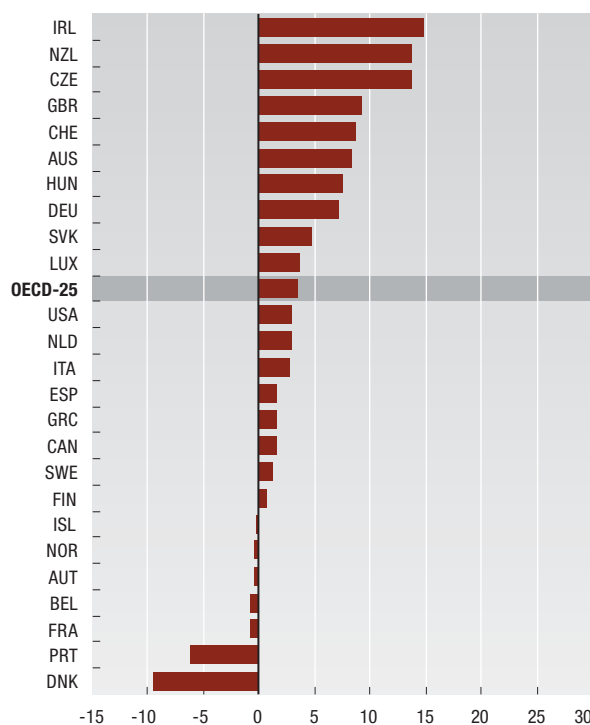
High or rising maternal employment rates are facilitated by a mixture of policy instruments that vary in importance across countries: access to affordable childcare; generosity of parental leave, tax and benefit systems that do not discourage employment, and the prevalence of flexible working-time arrangements. Generous parental leave arrangements and public childcare supports underlie high maternal employment rates in Nordic countries, while “family work reconciliation” in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Australia is mainly achieved through flexible working-time arrangements and part-time employment (although childcare capacity has grown rapidly in recent years in all three countries). Strong financial incentives to work and widespread use of informal care arrangements support high maternal employment rates in the United States.

Increasingly, public policy aims to encourage both parents, and particularly mothers, to stay in paid employment for reasons that include promotion of gender equity, a better use of labour market resources, and poverty alleviation (OECD, 2005). The same combination of policies that have proved effective in raising women employment rates will also help in supporting fertility rates: OECD countries with higher women employment rates also record higher fertility rates (D’Addio and Mira d’Ercole, 2005).

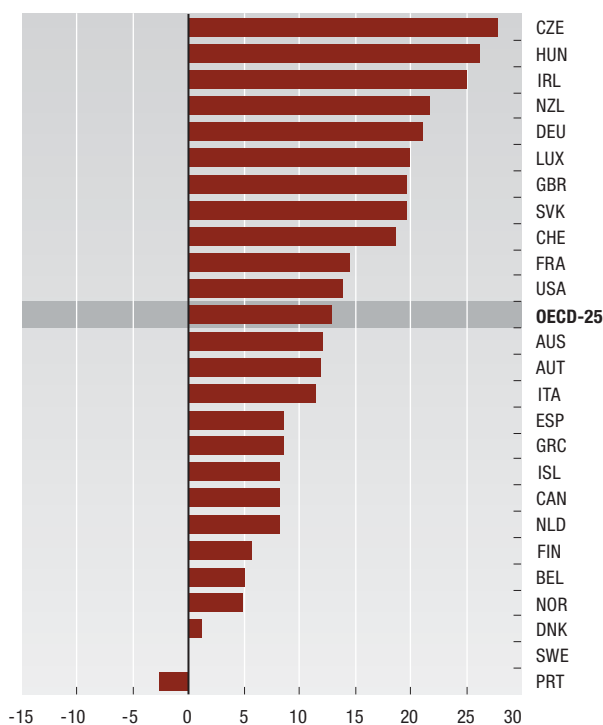
**Status indicators:** Employment (SS1), Childcare costs (SS4), Gender wage gaps (EQ3).

**Response indicators:** Public social spending (EQ5).

## SS3.1. Differences in employment rates between childless women and women with one child, 2003



## SS3.2. Differences in employment rates between childless women and women with two or more children, 2003



Note: A positive difference implies that childless women have higher employment rates than women in the other groups.  
Source: 2003 national labour force surveys.

## SS3.3. Lower maternal employment rates for mothers with youngest child aged under three

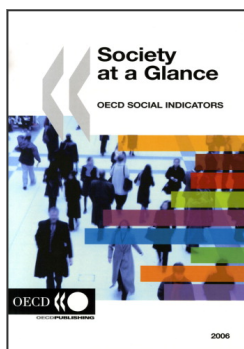
Mothers' employment rates by age of youngest child, in 2002,<sup>1</sup> as a percentage of 15-64 persons

	Age of youngest child				Age of youngest child		
	Under 3 <sup>2</sup>	3 to 5	6 to 14 <sup>3</sup>		Under 3 <sup>2</sup>	3 to 5	6 to 14 <sup>3</sup>
Austria	80.1	70.3	69.8	Italy	54.4	51.7	49.4
Belgium	70.4	67.4	68.6	Luxembourg	70.6	63.1	58.2
Canada	58.7	68.1	76.3	Netherlands	74.2	68.2	70.1
Czech Republic	16.8	36.5	69.2	New Zealand	43.2	58.2	74.7
Denmark	71.4	77.5	79.1	Portugal	75.3	81.9	76.3
Finland	52.1	74.7	85.3	Sweden	72.9	82.5	77.4
France	66.2	63.2	67.5	Switzerland	58.2	64.5	77.8
Germany	56.0	58.1	64.3	United Kingdom	57.2	56.9	67.0
Greece	47.9	50.9	53.5	United States	56.6	60.0	69.4
				OECD-18	60.1	64.1	69.7

- 2001 in Canada, Denmark, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand and the United States.
- Figures include mothers on short- and long-term maternity or parental leave. Excluding these mothers could have a significant impact on measured employment rates; for example, employment for mothers with a youngest child under three years would be significantly lower in Austria (40.1%), Finland (33.8%) and in Sweden (45.1%).
- 6-13 years old in the United States; 6-16 years old in Canada, Finland, Sweden; 6-17 years old in New Zealand.

StatLink: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/620248580783>

**Further reading** ■ D'Addio, A. and M. Mira d'Ercole (2005), "Trends and Determinants of Fertility Rates in OECD Countries: The Role of Policies", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Paper, No. 27, Paris. ■ OECD (2005), *Extending Opportunities - How Active Labour Market Policies Can Benefit Us All*, Paris.



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