



Joining Forces for Gender Equality

WHAT IS HOLDING US BACK?

Country note: the United Kingdom



Joining Forces for Gender Equality comprehensively analyses developments and policies for gender equality, including issues such as gender mainstreaming and budgeting, reforms to increase fathers' involvement in parental leave and childcare, pay transparency initiatives to tackle gender pay gaps, and systems to address gender-based violence. Increasingly, governments are paying attention to gender inequalities to more policy areas, including energy, the environment, foreign direct investment, nuclear energy, trade, and transport. Advancing gender equality is not just a moral imperative; it will strengthen future gender-equal economic growth and social cohesion.

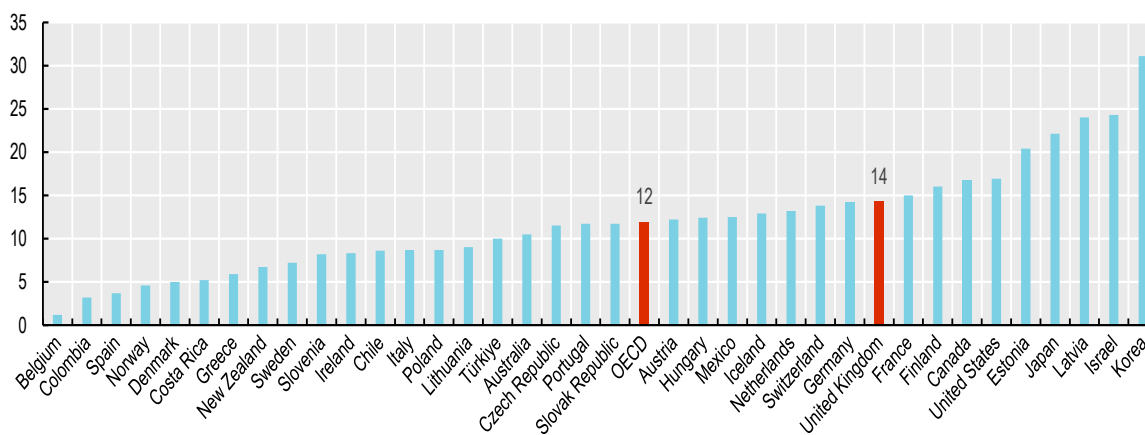
Gender equality in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has average gender equality outcomes compared with other OECD countries (see Table 1). Gender gaps in the school performance for reading scores in favour of girls are smaller than the OECD average while the gender gap in mathematics scores in favour of boys is above the OECD average. The gender gap in labour force participation in the UK is relatively small, while the share of women among managers and self-employed with employees is above the OECD average. The representation of women in public leadership positions is above the OECD average.

Yet, the gender pay gap is stubbornly persistent stemming from longstanding structural inequalities, such as an unequal division of paid and unpaid work, same skills but different jobs and responsibilities within firms, and occupational and sectoral segregation with an undervaluation of traditionally female-dominated jobs (Chapter 16). At about 14%, the gender pay gap for full-time earners in the United Kingdom is above the OECD average (Figure 1), but it has decreased faster than in many other OECD countries. The introduction of mandatory pay gap reporting in 2017 may have played role and could help narrow the pay gap further in future (Chapter 27).

Figure 1. At 14%, the gender wage gap in the United Kingdom is above the OECD average

Difference between median earnings of men and women relative to median earnings of men, full-time earners percentages, 2021 or latest data available



Note: Data refer to 2021, or except for Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Switzerland refer to 2020; for Ireland and Israel to 2019; and for Iceland, Slovenia and Türkiye to 2018.

Source: OECD Gender wage gap indicator, available at <https://data.oecd.org/earnwage/gender-wage-gap.htm>. – [Figure 16.1].

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Table 1. Summary indicators of gender equality

	Education			Employment & Entrepreneurship			Governance		
	Gender gap in mean PISA reading scores (boys–girls)	Gender gap in mean PISA mathematics scores (boys–girls)	Share of women among masters' graduates (%)	Gender gap in the labour force participation rate (men–women) (p.p.)	Share of women among managerial employment (%)	Share of women among self-employed with employees (%)	Share of women among parliamentary representatives (%)	Share of women among public sector employment (%)	Share of women among central government senior management (%)
UNITED KINGDOM	-20	12	61	7	37	28	35	66	42
OECD average	-29	6	58	11	34	25	34	58	37
Best female outcome	-52 (FIN)	-10 (ISL)	69 (ISL)	2 (LTU)	46 (LVA)	33 (NZL)	50 (MEX/NZL)	72 (SWE)	56 (LVA)
Worst female outcome	-10 (COL)	20 (COL)	35 (JPN)	40 (TUR)	13 (JPN)	12 (TUR)	10 (JPN)	25 (TUR)	4 (JPN)

Note: Best and worst female outcomes are shown according to the size of women's share relative to the OECD average share or according to the size of the gap relative to the OECD average gap. Source: OECD Gender Data Portal, <https://www.oecd.org/gender/data/>.

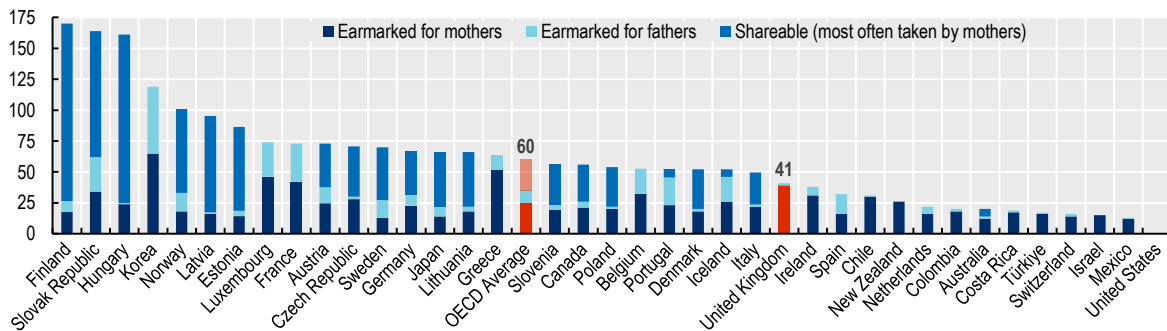
Much of the gender differences in pay – as well as many other gender inequalities on the labour market and at home – emerge and widen once children arrive (Chapter 16). Mothers tend to take longer leaves of absence from work than fathers and sometimes only return to work part-time. In the United Kingdom, 33% of women work less than 30 hours per week (Chapter 13).

Participation rates in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) facility are above OECD average (Chapter 24), and a step-wise extension of free childcare to children aged nine months and above from 2024 onwards will help improve affordability of childcare.

Paid leave entitlements in the United Kingdom are of shorter duration than across the OECD on average, and overall replacement rates are not high (Chapter 23). The first 6 weeks of maternity leave involve earnings-related payments, but the ensuing 33 weeks are paid at a relatively low flat payment-rate, and so is paternity leave (the last 13 weeks of maternity leave and the 18 weeks of parental leave are not reflected in Figure 2 as they are unpaid). Fathers are entitled to two weeks of paid paternity leave – which is well below the OECD-average of ten weeks earmarked for fathers.

Figure 2. Paid leave entitlements in the United Kingdom are shorter than the OECD average

Duration of paid maternity-, paternity-, parental- and homecare leave entitlements, in weeks, April 2022



Note: Since April 2022, there have been reforms of parental leave systems in various countries, including Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Japan, the Netherlands, and the Slovak Republic. In Japan, parents would have to take the “shareable” portion simultaneously (see [Figure 23.1](#)). Source: OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.1, https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf - [\[Figure 23.1\]](#)

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