



Joining Forces for Gender Equality

WHAT IS HOLDING US BACK?

Country note: the United States



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. The analysis builds on the "[Gender-data expansion project](#)" for women's economic empowerment as supported by the U.S. State Department. The analysis broadens the perspective on gender equality to include foreign direct investment, nuclear energy and transport. Advancing gender equality is not just a moral imperative; in times of rapidly ageing populations, low fertility and multiple crises, it will strengthen future gender-equal economic growth and social cohesion, as also outlined in the US [National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#).

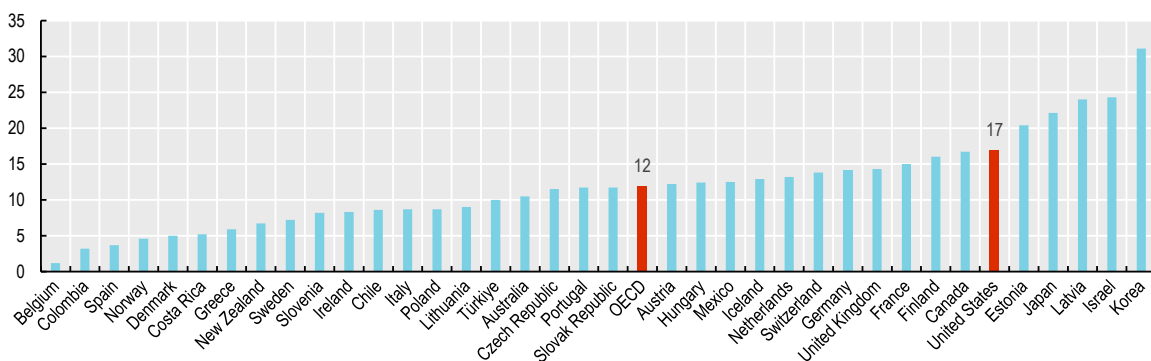
Gender equality in the United States

Many gender outcomes in the United States are around the average of other OECD countries (Table 1). Gender gaps in the school performance of young men and women, labour force participation, self-employment, public employment and public leadership are close to the OECD average. The share of women in Congress is low compared to the OECD average, but the US has a relative high share of women among master's graduates, which may contribute to the relatively high share of women managers in the private sector.

The gender pay gap is stubbornly persistent stemming from longstanding structural inequalities, such as an unequal division of paid and unpaid work at home, same skills but different jobs and responsibilities within firms, and occupational and sectoral segregation with an undervaluation of traditionally female-dominated jobs. In the United States, the gender pay gap for full-time earners is 17% -- well above the OECD average (Figure 1). This is because pay gaps are relatively large among top earners, as 22%, is particularly large. The gender pay gap among low wage earners is 10% -- about the OECD average ([OECD Gender Data Portal](#)). The introduction of new policy tools, e.g. regular pay gap reporting for private companies, could help narrow the pay gap in future.

Figure 1. At 17%, the US gender wage gap is well 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

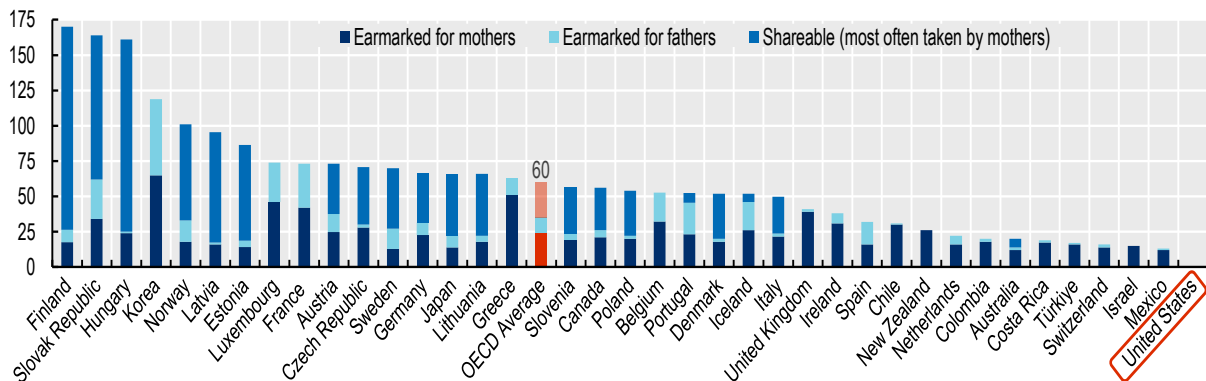
	Education			Employment & Entrepreneurship			Governance		
	Gender gap in mean PISA reading scores (boys–girls)	Gender gap in mean PISA mathematics scores (boys–girls)	Share of women among masters' graduates (%)	Gender gap in the labour force participation rate (men–women) (p.p.)	Share of women among managerial 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 STATES	-24	9	61	11	41	26	29	58	37
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/>.

Many gender inequalities at home and at work emerge and widen once children arrive. Rather than fathers, mothers tend to take leave, resign or reduce paid working hours to look after children. Therefore, many OECD countries aim to provide families with a continuum of supports during childhood, including paid parental leave for use by both parents and formal childcare supports. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides unpaid leave for childcare, and some states/territories grant paid family leave and/or income support during maternity leave. The United States is the only OECD country without a national paid maternity leave scheme.

Low enrolment rates among 3-5 year olds in childcare (Chapter 24) restrict mothers' labour force participation, and also raise child development concerns. Investing in the care infrastructure will strengthen working families, and support both men and women in entering, staying and advancing in the labour force. In April 2023, the US government announced a historic set of investments in care infrastructure, with a proposed USD 750 billion over the next 10 years, to address childcare and home-based and long-term care needs.

Figure 2. The United States is the only OECD country without a national paid maternity leave scheme
Duration of paid maternity-, paternity-, parental- and homecare leave entitlements, in weeks, April 2022



Note: Data refer to national/federally provided leaves and do not include employer-provided schemes or entitlements offered by states/provinces or local governments. 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. Source: OECD Family Database, Indicator PF2.1, https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf - [Figure 23.1]

Contacts

Willem ADEMA (✉ willem.adema@oecd.org)

Jonas FLUCHTMANN (✉ jonas.fluchtmann@oecd.org)

Valentina PATRINI (✉ valentina.patrini@oecd.org)