



Research Report | May 2016

# Which Countries in Europe Have the Best Gender Equality in the Workplace?



**Llewellyn Consulting**  
*Independent Economics*

 **glassdoor**<sup>®</sup>

# Foreword

Despite improvements in gender equality in recent decades, much remains to be done. Around the world, studies routinely find women are less likely to participate in the labor market, are underrepresented among C-suite positions, and earn lower pay on average than their male counterparts—even for the same job title, level of experience and education.

In this report from Glassdoor Economic Research, conducted by Llewellyn Consulting, we compare 18 European countries and the United States on a variety of gender equality measures, including the gap between male and female employment rates; female representation on corporate boards, legislatures and top management; and the “cost of motherhood” in terms of lower wages for mothers.

Among the European countries we examined we find Sweden, Norway, and Finland rank highest for best overall gender equality. By contrast, Greece, Italy and Ireland ranked as having the lowest overall gender equality in the workplace. In the United States, gender equality ranks near the middle of the pack at 8th among the 18 countries.

Glassdoor has long been at the forefront of promoting pay transparency and workplace fairness around the world. By helping European job seekers better understand which countries offer the highest degree of gender equality at work, we hope this report contributes to that goal.

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*Chief Economist*  
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## Overview

1 | This study looks at the status of women in the workplace — and specifically which European countries have the best gender equality in the workplace. It examines where the gender gap in employment is most severe, and in what types of jobs women are under-represented.

2 | The analysis spans 18 countries, and is based on the following key indicators:

- The difference in employment rates between men and women for overall employment and for full-time employment (the “gender gap” in employment).
- The gender gap in employment by educational attainment.
- The female-to-male ratio in labour force participation, in tertiary education enrollment, in professional and technical positions, and among legislators, senior officials, and managers.
- The proportion of managers who are women, and the share of women on the boards of the largest listed companies.
- Finally, the “cost of motherhood” is considered — that’s to say, the increase in the gender pay gap accounted for by the presence of children.
- The United States is included as benchmark.

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# Key Findings

- **The gender employment gap persists.** Although more and more women are entering the workplace, in all countries we examined there are still fewer women than men in the workplace. This gender gap in employment is largest in Italy, Greece, the U.S., and Ireland; and smallest in Finland, Sweden, and Norway.
- **Further education significantly increases a woman's probability of being employed.** The gender gap in employment for those who have gone through tertiary education is around half of what it is for those with less than upper secondary education. Further education thus significantly increases a woman's probability of being employed, a fact that it would seem is not being ignored — across Europe more women than men are now enrolled in tertiary education. The gender gap here too differs significantly by country, however, and at all education attainment levels. At the tertiary education level, the gap is greatest in Greece, the U.S., Italy, and the UK; and least in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.
- **Women are especially under-represented at the more senior levels,** and least under-represented in professional and more technically-demanding jobs. Women are particularly under-represented in jobs that involve decision-making responsibilities (management): fewer than 40 percent of managers across Europe are women — the Netherlands, at 26 percent, is the worst performing country. Women are under-represented at the board level, too: fewer than 40 percent of the board members of the largest listed companies are women: Estonia, Greece, Portugal, and Ireland, all at around 10 percent, are the worst performers.
- **The cost of motherhood remains large.** The increase in the gender pay gap attributable to the presence of children is most severe in Ireland (at over 30 percentage points), followed by Germany (23pp), and Norway (19pp). The cost of motherhood is lowest in Italy, Spain, and Belgium (3pp or less). The U.S. has the fifth-largest increase in gap at 16pp.



# Key Findings

**Figure 1.** Gender inequality heat map, selected countries

Indicator	Sweden	Norway	Finland	Estonia	Portugal	France	Denmark	U.S.	Belgium	Spain	U.K.	Austria	Switzerland	Netherlands	Germany	Ireland	Italy	Greece
<b>Gender inequality as measured by</b>																		
Employment rates	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.0	0.1
Full-time equivalent employment rates	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.6	0.8	N/A	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.3
Labour force participation	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.0	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.4	0.0	0.2
Tertiary education enrolment	1.0	0.9	0.4	0.9	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.8	0.1
“Cost of motherhood”	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.0	1.0	0.7
<b>Gender gap in employment by level of education</b>																		
Less than upper secondary education	0.4	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.3
Upper secondary education	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.7	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.0
Tertiary education	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.4	0.8	0.6	0.9	0.1	0.6	0.5	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.0
<b>Gender gap in employment by job type</b>																		
Professional and technical positions	0.3	0.3	0.3	1.0	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.3
Legislators, senior officials, and managers	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.0	1.0	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.1
Managers	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.1	N/A	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.7	0.0	0.3	0.7	0.1	0.2
Board members	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.0	0.1	0.9	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.1
<b>Aggregate score</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.2</b>

**Best Three Scores**

**Average or Above Average Scores**

**Below Average Scores**

**Worst Three Scores**

Notes: Data have been normalised using the min-max method, and are expressed as 0-to-1 scores (best = 1.0; worst = 0.0). For each indicator, the best three scores are coloured dark green. Light green cells = average or above-average scores. Pink cells = below-average scores. Red = worst three scores. The aggregate score is the (unweighted) average of all the indicators for each country.

Source: Glassdoor Economic Research; European Commission Gender Equality database; OECD, and Eurostat

# Introduction

The objective of this report is to measure the progress of European countries in achieving parity between men and women in the workplace, in terms of the proportion of men and women in work and in different types of jobs. The report has looked at gender inequality across a range of data from the World Economic Forum, European Commission, OECD, and Eurostat in order to score each country, and rank them best to worst.

**Over the past decades, more and more women have entered Europe's labour force.** Female participation rates have increased almost everywhere. The one exception is Denmark, where it was already relatively high. Increases have been particularly significant in Spain and Ireland. Female relative to male participation is however still especially low in Italy, Greece, and Belgium.<sup>1</sup>

**Nevertheless, gender inequality persists.** Gender inequality — in terms of involuntary low participation, low pay, diminished prospects, etc. — persists, and is generally more prevalent at senior levels.

Gender inequality persists and is generally more prevalent at senior levels.

## Gender Gap in Employment

The difference in employment rates between men and women is known as the gender gap in employment. Female employment rates are invariably lower than male, meaning that women are less likely to be employed than men. In the European Union, for example, of the 213 million employed, 54 percent are men and 46 percent are women.<sup>2</sup>

The gender gap in overall employment<sup>3</sup> is largest in Italy and Greece, at 18 percentage points (pp) and 17pp respectively: in Italy, only 47 percent of working-age women are employed,<sup>4</sup> compared with around 65 percent of working-age men; in Greece, it is 41 percent for women and 58 percent for men. The gap is smallest in Finland, Sweden, and Norway, at between only 2 and 4 percentage points. In Finland, 68 percent of women and 70 percent of men of working age are employed; in Sweden and Norway, the proportion is 73 percent and 77 percent. The U.S. gender gap in employment is relatively wide, at 11 percent, making it the third worst country for gender parity in the workplace, behind Italy and Greece.

As regards full-time equivalent employment (i.e. when taking into account the number of hours worked) the gender gap widens, and is generally two to three times higher than for overall employment. This highlights the differences in the hours worked by men and women. (Figure 2).

Women are less likely to be employed, particularly full-time.

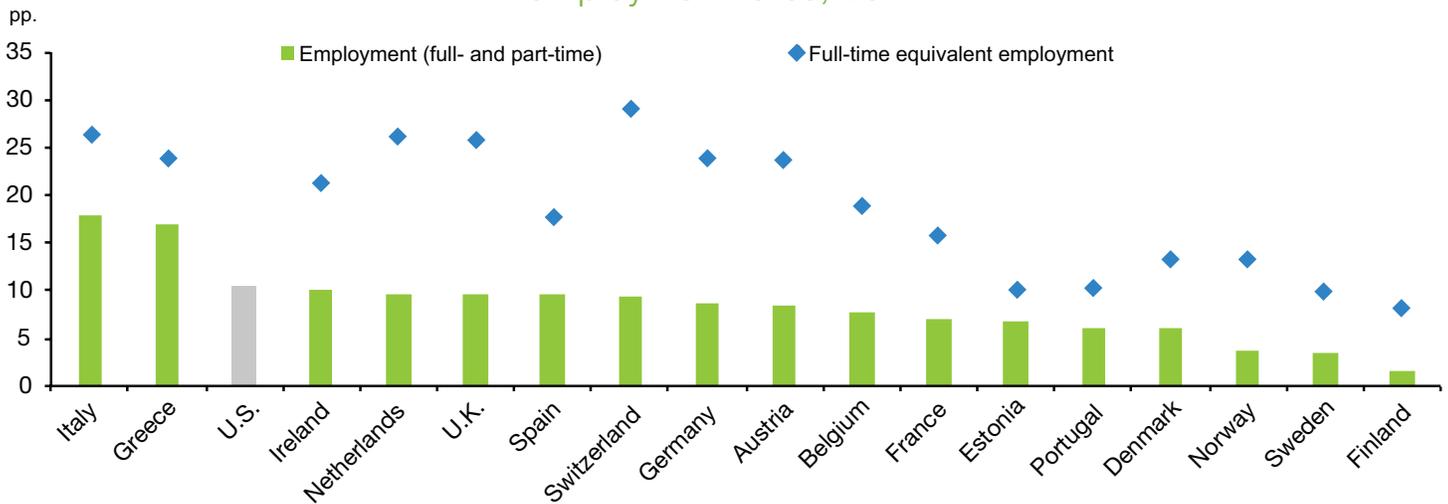
The gender gap differs by education attainment levels. It is generally largest for those with less than upper secondary education, and is particularly large in Italy, at around 30pp; and in Greece, Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands and the U.S. (all between 24 and 20pp). Only in Norway and Finland is it below 10pp.

# Gender Gap in Employment

The gender gap for those who have gone through tertiary education is around half of what it is for those with less than upper secondary education. Further education thus significantly increases a woman's probability of being employed, a fact that it would seem is not being ignored – across Europe more women than men are now enrolled in tertiary education. At the tertiary education level, the gap is greatest in Greece, the U.S., Italy, and the UK; and least in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. (Figure 3).

The gender employment gap decreases with education, and is considerably smaller for those with tertiary education.

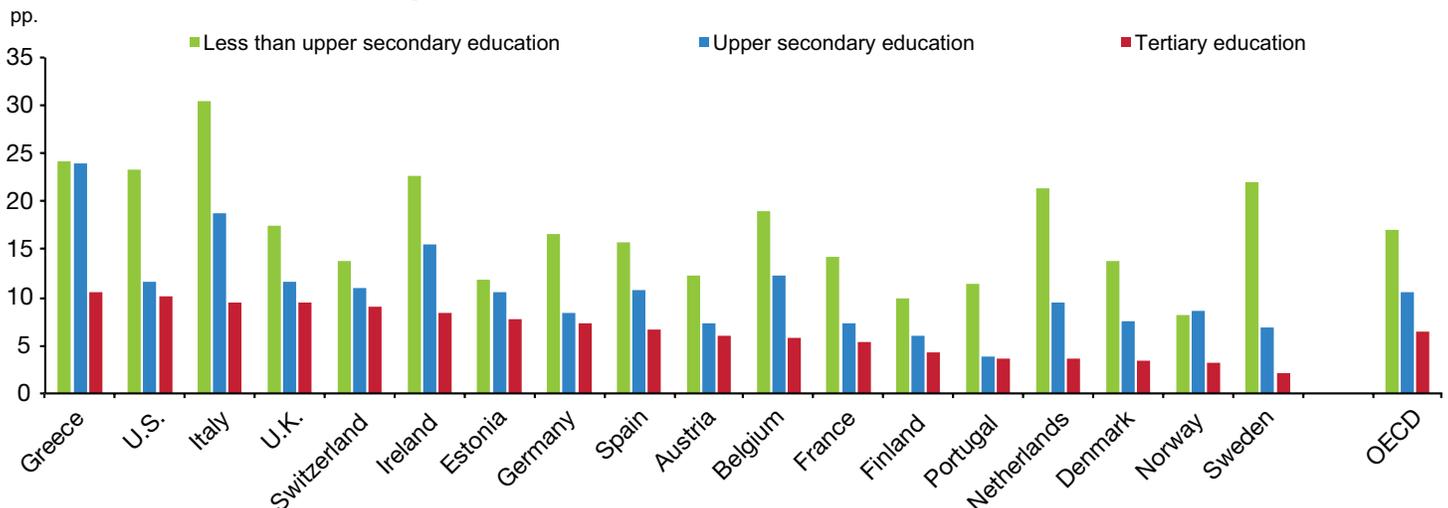
**Figure 2.** Gender gap in employment rates and full-time equivalent employment rates, 2014



Notes: The gender gap in employment rates is defined as the difference in employment rates, for 15 to 64 year olds, between males and females. The full-time equivalent employment rate is calculated as the employment rate for 15-64 year olds multiplied by the average usual weekly hours worked per person in employment (including both the self-employed and employees), divided by 40. Data for average hours worked for both employees and the self-employed are not available for the US.

Source: OECD and Glassdoor Economic Research

**Figure 3.** Gender gap in employment rates by educational attainment, 2013



Notes: The gender gap in employment rates is defined as the difference in employment rates, for 25 to 64 year olds, between males and females.

Source: OECD Employment Outlook 2015

# Gender Inequality by Job Type

Across the advanced economies, there tend to be proportionately more women than men enrolled in tertiary education. Greater educational equality, however, does not necessarily guarantee equality in the workplace — women are still under-represented in many jobs, especially at more senior levels.

In all countries in this study, fewer than half of the legislative and senior positions are occupied by women, although the ratio is highest in the U.S. This ratio is significantly higher than the next best European countries, which are Sweden and Norway.

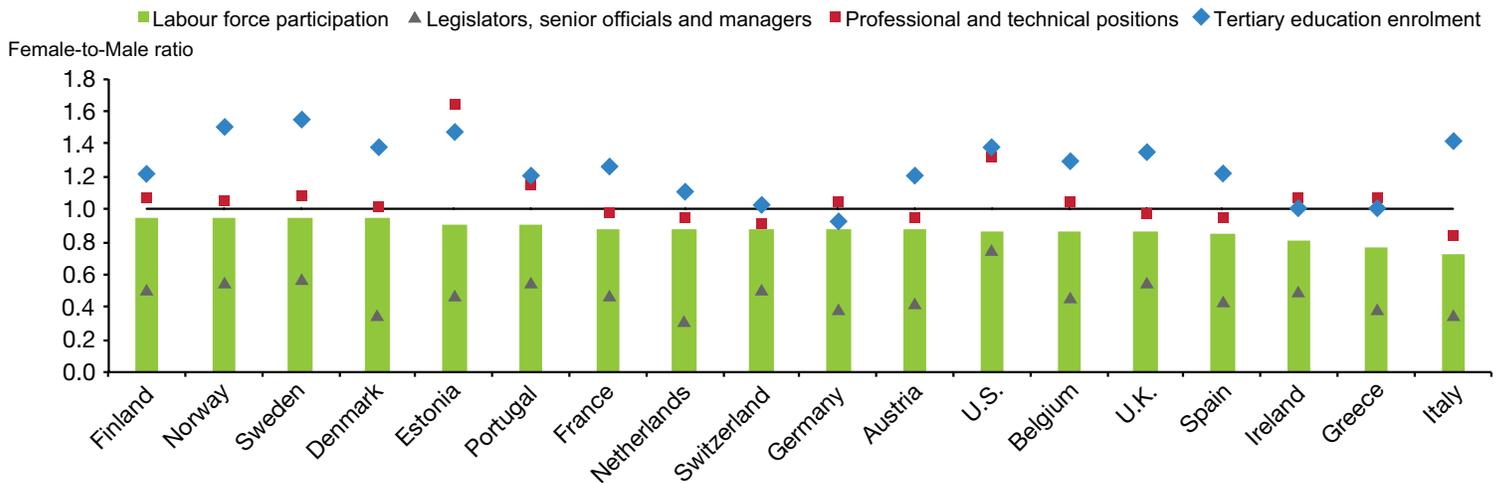
Across the advanced economies, inequality in terms of the balance between the share of male versus female workers tends to be lowest in the professional and technically-demanding positions like health, teaching, legal, social and cultural professionals. (Figure 4).

Women are particularly under-represented more senior jobs: fewer than 40 percent of managers across Europe are women. Sweden, Norway, the UK, and Portugal, at close to 40 percent, are the best performers; the Netherlands, Denmark, and Italy, at around 27 percent, the worst. (Figure 5).

Gender inequality varies by job type and country. It is higher in senior positions; lower in professional and technical positions.

Across Europe, under 40 percent of managers are women — Sweden and Norway have the highest proportion; the Netherlands the lowest.

**Figure 4.** Gender gap indicators: economic and political empowerment (female-to-male ratio)

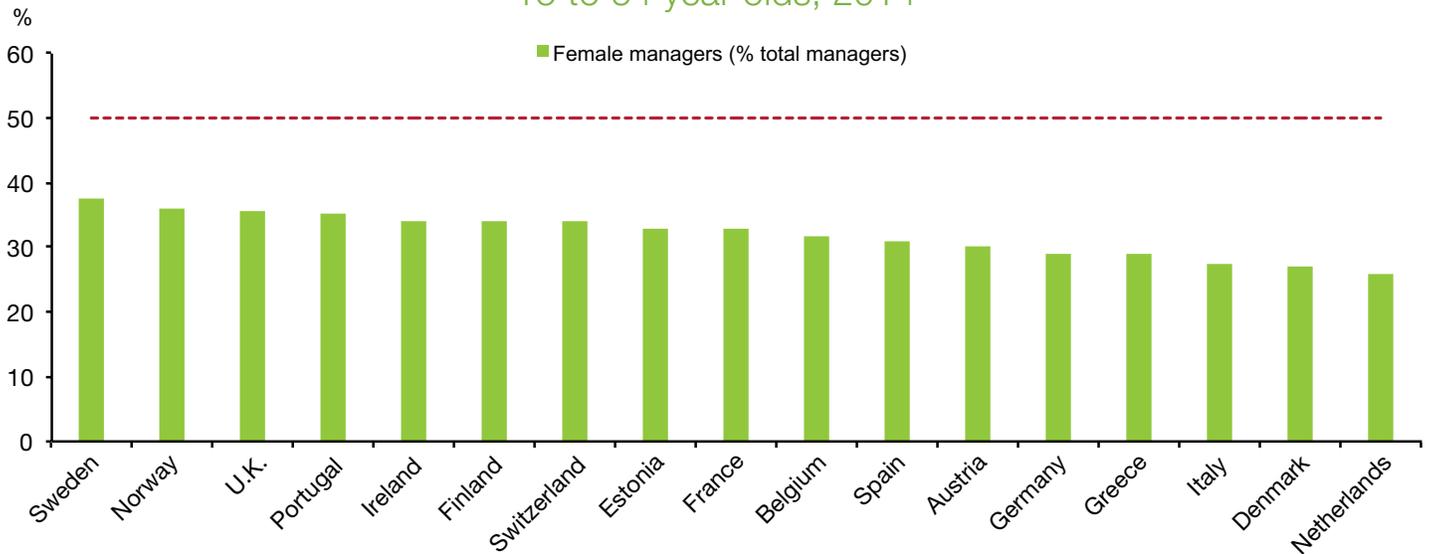


Notes: The closer to the 'one' line, the less the inequality. The higher the number, the more women there are in relation to men.

Source: WEF Global Gender Gap Index 2015

# Gender Inequality by Job Type

**Figure 5.** Share of female managers as a % of total managers, 15 to 64 year olds, 2014



Source: Eurostat

At board level, women are under-represented too: fewer than 40 percent of board members of listed companies are women. Norway, at nearly 40 percent, has the highest proportion of women, due partly to a legislation-based quota system introduced in 2006. In France,<sup>5</sup> Finland, and Sweden, around 30 percent of board members are women; in Denmark, the UK, Italy, and Germany,<sup>6</sup> around 26 percent. Estonia, Greece, Portugal, and Ireland, at between 10 and 13 percent, have the lowest. The U.S. is in the middle of the pack, at 24 percent, comparable with the Netherlands. (Figure 6).

Women are underrepresented at board level too. Norway, at nearly 40 percent, has the highest, Estonia, at around 10 percent, the worst.

**Figure 6.** Share of women on the boards, largest listed companies



Notes: Data as of April 2015, except for Switzerland and the US (December 2015). The companies covered are the largest publicly listed companies in each country (members of the primary blue-chip index in each country).

Source: European Commission, Database on women and men in decision-making; Llewellyn Consulting

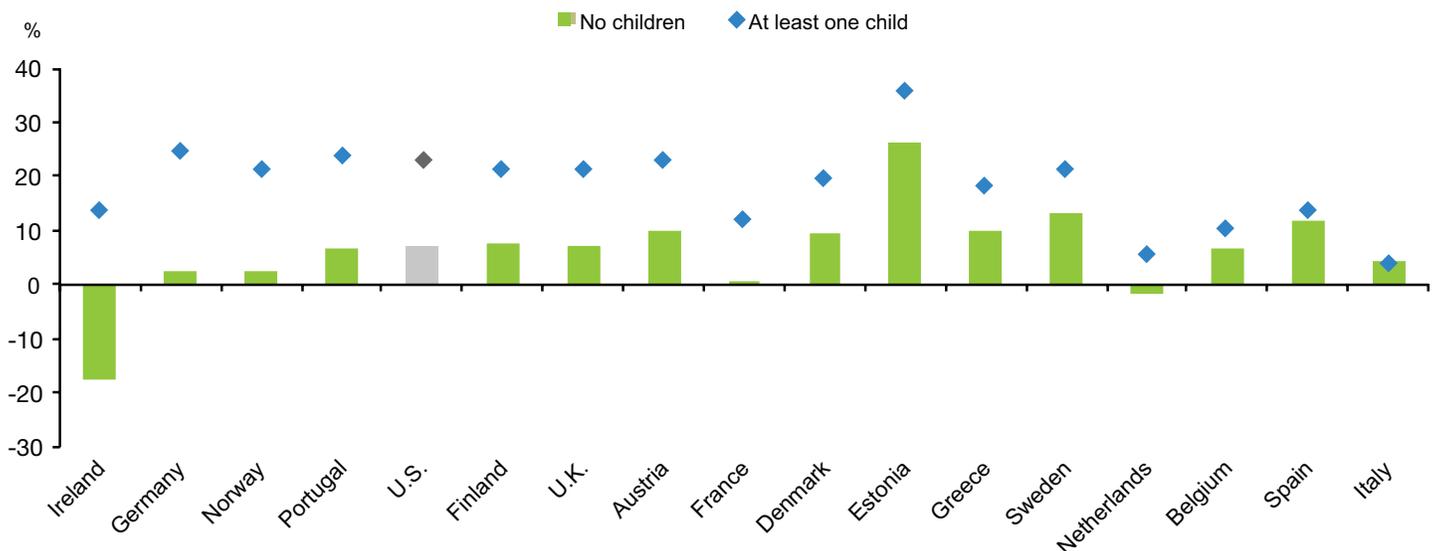
# The Cost of Motherhood

A recent study by Glassdoor Economic Research confirmed the gender pay gap is real and significant — ranging from 5 to 6 percent in European countries and the U.S. — even after controls for education, work experience, age, location, industry and even job title and company are applied. When looking at the overarching “unadjusted” pay gap, the economic cost of motherhood — the increase in the gender pay gap accounted for by the presence of children<sup>7</sup> — remains large. Social and family structures in effect tend to penalise women with children. Childcare costs are, in some countries, high relative to earnings; and the burden of unpaid household work and childcare often falls on mothers.

The cost of motherhood is highest in Ireland, where the pay difference (with respect to men) between women with at least one child and those with no children is 31 percentage points. The cost of motherhood is also comparatively high in Germany (23 percentage points): women aged 25 to 44 with no children and who work full-time are paid around 2 percent less than men, compared with 25 percent less when they do have children. In the UK, the gender pay gap increases by 14 percentage points when women have children; in Austria, by 13 percentage points; in France, by 12 percentage points; in the Netherlands by 8 percentage points. The cost of motherhood is lowest in Italy, Spain, and Belgium (3 percentage points or less). In the U.S., the pay difference between women with at least one child and those with no children is 16 percentage points, which is greater than most European countries in this study. (Figure 7).

The cost of motherhood is highest in Ireland, comparatively high in Germany, and lowest in Italy, Spain, and Belgium.

**Figure 7. Gender pay gap by presence of children, 25-44 year olds**



Notes: Countries are arranged from left to right in descending order of gender pay gap between women with no children and women with at least one child. Children are defined as those under 16 years old. The gender pay gap is defined as the difference between male and female median wages divided by male median wages. The wage gap is calculated for men and women aged 25-44 who work full-time, using hourly wages.

Source: OECD Closing the Gender Gap, 2012

# Taking It All Together

In summary, there are fewer women than men in the workplace, although further education significantly increases a woman's chances of being employed. Women are most-represented in professional and more technically-demanding jobs. The gender gap in overall employment is smallest in Finland, Sweden, and Norway, at between only 2 and 4 percentage points. Women are particularly under-represented in jobs with more seniority: fewer than 40 percent of managers across Europe are women. Sweden, Norway, the UK, and Portugal, at close to 40 percent, are the best performers. Women are under-represented at board level: in every country we examined, fewer than 40 percent of board members of listed companies are women, with some countries having as few as 10 percent. Norway has the highest proportion of women on boards, due to a legislation-based quota system introduced in 2006. The one area where Norway falls down in this report is the cost of motherhood: women aged 25 to 44 with no children and who work full-time are paid around 3 percent less than men, compared with 21 percent less when they do have children.

Overall, the European countries in which overall gender inequality is least severe are Sweden, Norway, and Finland, although all of these countries still have room for improvement in gender equality at work. By contrast, Greece, Italy, and Ireland lie on the other end of the spectrum, followed by Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

## Endnotes

1 Eurostat. Data are for 2014.

2 Eurostat. Data are for 2014.

3 Full- and part-time.

4 Employed people are those aged 15 or over who report that they have worked in gainful employment for at least one hour in the previous week or who had a job but were absent from work during the reference week. The working age population refers to people aged 15 to 64. Source: OECD. Data are for 2014.

5 In 2011, France introduced a law requiring that, by 2016, women must make up 40 percent of corporate board members.

6 Germany passed legislation requiring that as of 2016, 30 percent of seats of non-executive boards of listed companies need be occupied by women.

7 Increase in gender pay gap (for those aged 25 to 44) between women with no children and with children. The gender pay gap is defined as the difference between male and female median wages divided by male median wages.

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