

## LMF1.3: Maternal employment by partnership status

### **Definitions and methodology**

This indicator presents information on maternal employment by partnership status through two main measures:

- i. *Employment rates for partnered women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14*, with 'partnered women' defined as those who live in the same household as a spouse or cohabiting partner (with the exception of Canada, where the woman's partnership status is based on their civil status), and with 'children' defined as any children aged 0-14 inclusive (for Canada and the United States, children aged 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 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 single women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14*, with single women defined as those without a spouse or cohabiting partner in the same household (with the exception of Canada, where the woman's partnership status is based on their civil status), and 'children' again defined as any children aged 0-14 inclusive (for Canada and the United States, children aged 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).

In both cases, the household may contain other adults – including siblings or grandparents or other relatives and non-relatives – with the woman's partnership status based only on whether or not a partner is present.

To explore whether the impact of partnership on the likelihood of employment differs with socio-economic status, this indicator also presents information on employment rates for partnered and for single mothers by education level:

- iii. *Employment rates for partnered women and for single 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).

And employment rates for partnered mothers by the employment status of their partner:

- iv. *Employment rates for partnered women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child (aged 0-14) by partner's employment status*, with the partner classified as either 'employed' or 'not employed' according to the standard [ILO guidelines](#).

Information is presented only for women aged 15-64 with dependent children (from here on generally *mothers*), although data for 25-54 year olds are also available for many OECD 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'. Differences in treatment of parents on maternity, paternity and parental leave are discussed in indicator [LMF1.2](#).

**Other relevant indicators:** SF1.1: Family size and composition; SF1.2: Children in families; LMF1.2: Maternal employment; LMF2.2 and LMF2.3 Usual working hours' distribution among couple and sole parents;

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

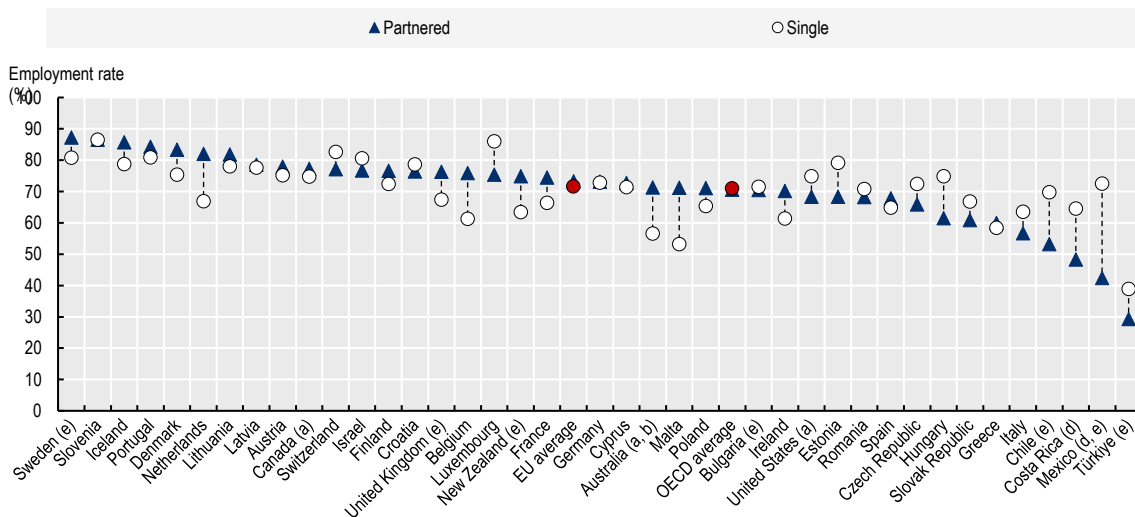
The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

## Key findings

Across the OECD, maternal employment rates vary distinctively with the partnership status of mothers (Chart LMF1.3.A). While for 21 OECD countries, partnered mothers are more likely to be in gainful employment, single mothers are more likely to be employed in 13 OECD countries. In many cases, the absolute differences in employment rates by partnership status are largest in countries where employment of single mothers is more common than employment for partnered mothers. Overall, across the OECD, there is no difference in the average rate for both partnership statuses (71%). Nevertheless, single mothers are at least 10 percentage points more likely to be employed than those in partnerships in Chile, Costa Rica, Estonia, Hungary and Luxembourg well as more than 30 percentage points in Mexico. On the other hand, partnered mothers are at least 10 percentage points more likely to be employed in Australia, Belgium, the Netherlands, and New Zealand.

**Chart LMF1.3.A. Employment rates for partnered mothers and single mothers, 2021 or latest available**

Employment rates (%) for women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14, by partnership status



Note: For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

a. For Australia, data cover all women aged 15 and over. For Canada and the United States, children aged 0-17.

b. For Australia, women with 'at least one child aged 0-14' are those whose 'relationship in household' is classified as either 'wife or partner with children under 15' or 'lone parent with children under 15'. Data refer to June months.

c. For Canada partnership status is based on civil status: 'partnered' women are those whose civil status is 'married' or 'living in common-law', and single women are those who are 'separated', 'divorced', 'widowed' or 'single, never married'.

d. 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.

e. Data for Sweden and New Zealand refer to 2020, for the United Kingdom, Mexico, and Bulgaria to 2019, for Chile to 2017 and for Türkiye to 2013.

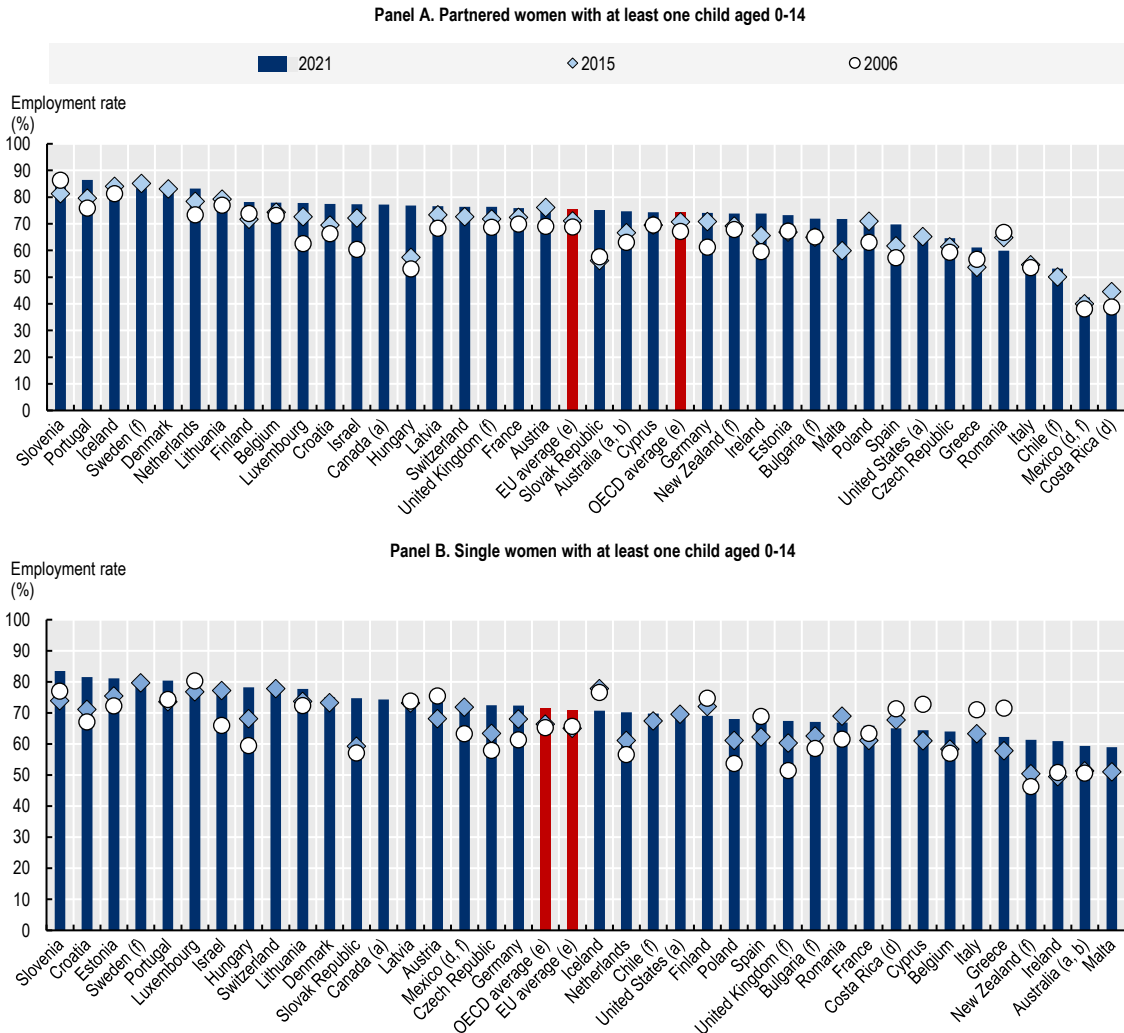
Source: [For Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); [for Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey](#); [for Chile, CASEN](#); For Costa Rica, Iceland, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, and Switzerland, OECD questionnaire; [for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey](#); [for Türkiye, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey](#); [for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

Employment rates for both partnered and single women were higher in 2021 than in 2006 for each OECD country for which data was available (Chart LMF1.3.B). On average across the OECD, employment rates for partnered mothers have risen from 67% in 2006, to 71% in 2015 and 74% in 2021 (Chart LMF1.3.B, Panel A). With about 2 percentage points difference, the rate nevertheless decreased for Sweden between 2015 and 2021, as well as by 0.3 percentage points for Austria. For single mothers, increases have been particularly strong between 2015 and 2021 when employment rates rose from 66% to 71%, but almost stable between 2006 and 2015 (Chart LMF1.3.B, Panel B). Rates fell between 2015 and 2021 for three

OECD countries – Costa Rica, Iceland and Finland. In Costa Rica, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Italy, and Spain the share of employed single mothers in 2021 is also smaller than in 2006.

**Chart LMF1.3.B. Employment rates for partnered mothers and single mothers, 2006, 2015 and 2021 or latest available**

Employment rates (%) for partnered women and single women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14



Note: For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

a. For Australia, data cover all women aged 15 and over. For Canada and the United States, children aged 0-17.

b. For Australia, women with 'at least one child aged 0-14' are those whose 'relationship in household' is classified as either 'wife or partner with children under 15' or 'one parent with children under 15'. Data refer to June months.

c. For Canada partnership status is based on civil status: 'partnered' women are those whose civil status is 'married' or 'living in common-law', and single women are those who are 'separated', 'divorced', 'widowed' or 'single, never married'.

d. 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.

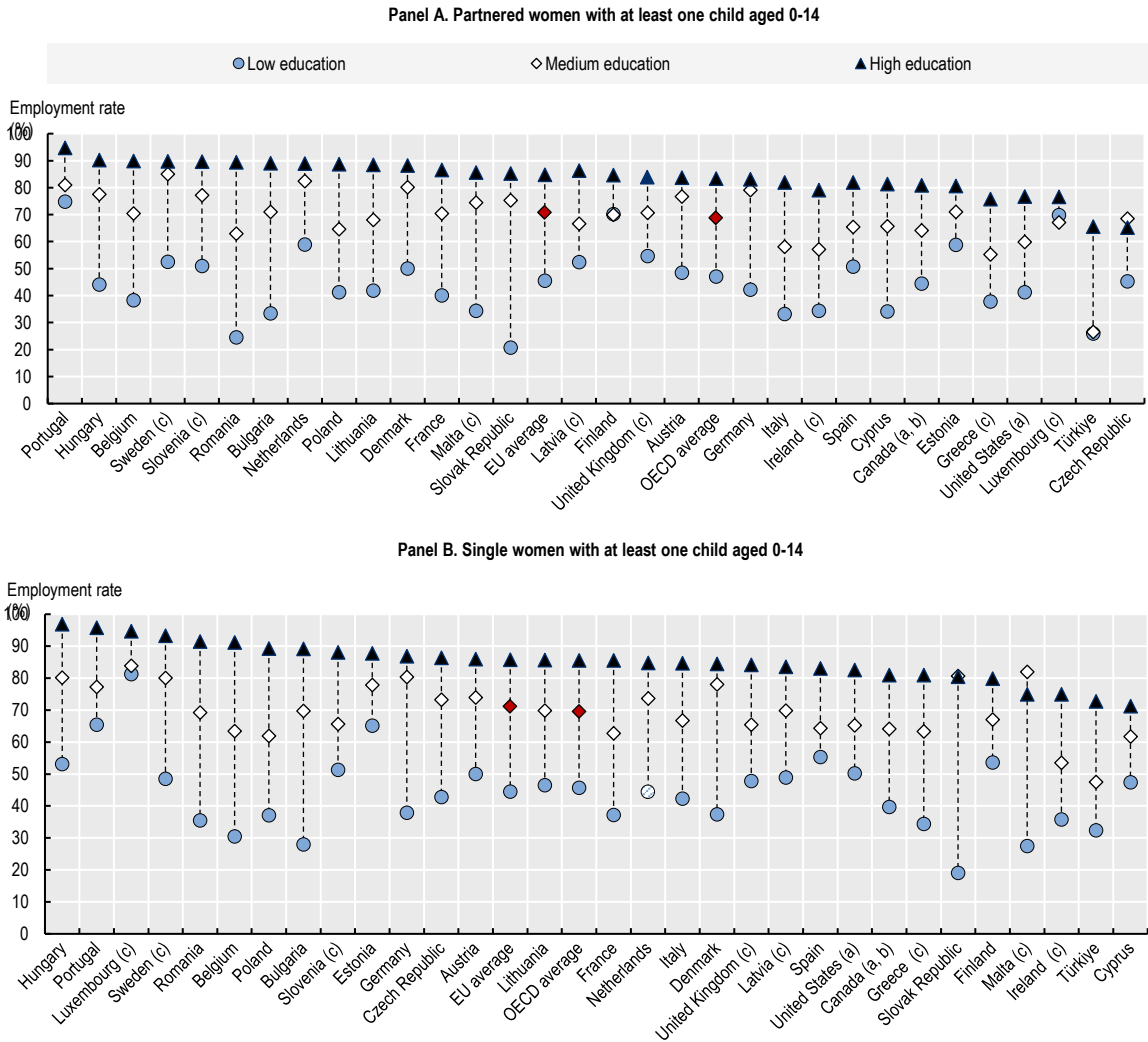
e. EU and OECD averages refers to countries with data available for all three years.

f. Data for Sweden and New Zealand refer to 2020, for the United Kingdom, Mexico and Bulgaria to 2019, and for Chile to 2017.

Source: [For Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); [for Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey](#); [for Chile, CASEN](#); For Costa Rica, Iceland, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, and Switzerland, OECD questionnaire; [for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey](#); [for Türkiye, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey](#); [for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

### Chart LMF1.3.C. Employment rates for partnered mothers and single mothers by level of education, 2021 or latest available

Employment rates (%) for partnered women and single women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14, by level of education



Note: 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). For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

a. For Canada and the United States, data cover children aged 0-17.

b. For Canada partnership status is based on civil status: 'partnered' women are those whose civil status is 'married' or 'living in common-law', and single women are those who are 'separated', 'divorced', 'widowed' or 'single, never married'.

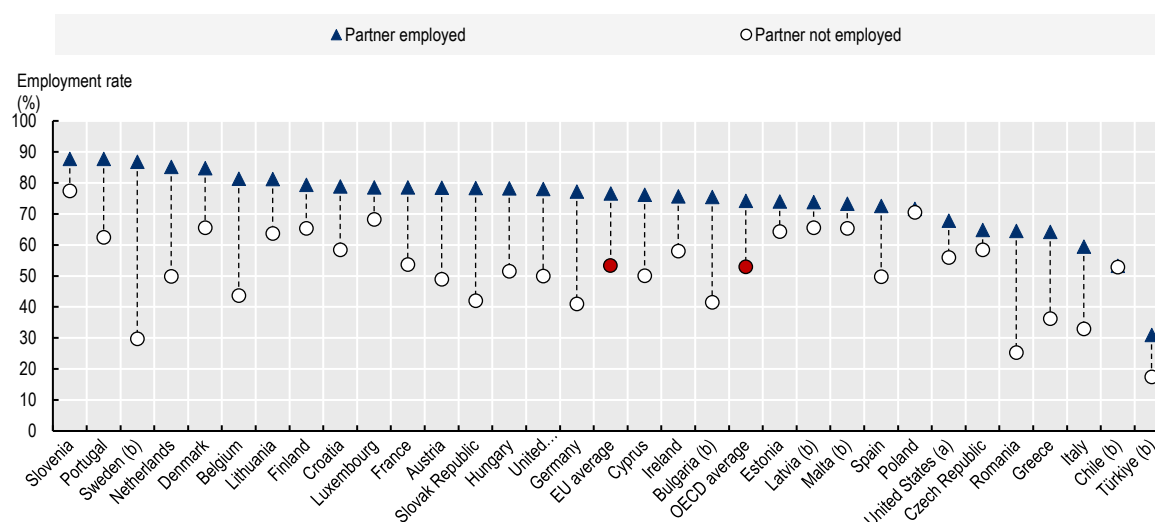
c. Data refer to 2020 for Greece and Ireland, to 2019 for the United Kingdom, to 2016 for Latvia, Slovenia and Malta, to 2015 for Sweden and to 2012 for Luxembourg.

Source: [for Canada, Canadian Labour Force Survey](#); [for Chile, CASEN](#); [for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey](#); [for Türkiye, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey](#); [for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

As pointed out in indicator [LMF1.2](#), employment rates for all mothers vary along the degree of educational attainment. Across OECD countries, employment rates for partnered mothers vary from 47% for those with low educational attainment to 69% for those with medium education and 83% for those with high levels of educational attainment (Chart LMF1.3.C, panel A). For single mothers, rates vary slightly more – from 46% on average for those with low educational attainment, 70% for those with medium education to 86% for those with high educational attainment (Chart LMF1.3.C, panel B). In some countries, differences in the impact of education by partnership status are very large. In Belgium and the Slovak Republic, for instance, employment rates for highly educated partnered mothers are about 50 percentage points higher than those for partnered mothers with low levels of educational attainment. For highly educated single mothers this is additionally the case in Latvia and Poland.

**Chart LMF1.3.D. Employment rates for partnered mothers by partner's employment status, 2021 or latest available**

Employment rates (%) for partnered women (15-64 year olds) with at least one child aged 0-14, by partner's employment status



Note: For some countries in some years, sample sizes can be small, especially for partnered mothers with a non-employed partner. Estimates based on fewer than 50 cases have been removed.

a. For the United States, data cover children aged 0-17.

b. Data for Sweden, Latvia, and Malta refer to 2020, for the United Kingdom and Bulgaria refer to 2019, for Chile to 2017 and for Türkiye to 2013.

Source: [For Chile, CASEN](#); [for European countries, European Union Labour Force Survey](#); [for Türkiye, Turkish Household Labour Force Survey](#); [for the United States, U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

With a few notable exceptions that show no substantial differences – namely Chile and Poland – partnered mothers across the OECD are more likely to be employed if their partner is employed as well. On average for OECD countries, 74% of mothers with employed partners are in paid work themselves, while 53% of mothers without employed partners are in work. At more than 30 percentage points, the largest difference between partnered mothers with and without employed partners across OECD countries can be found in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic and Sweden. At more than 25 percentage points, differences are also large in Austria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

### 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.

Specific comparability issues arise for a few countries. In Australia, women with 'at least one child aged 0-14' are those whose 'relationship in household' is classified as either 'wife or partner with children under 15' or 'lone parent with children under 15'. Women with 'no children aged 0-14' are those with any other type of 'relationship in household'. In households that contain more than one mother (e.g. some same-sex parent households and some three-generation households), the employment status of the older mother(s) is not covered. For Mexico, data cover mothers who are reported as the head of the household or the spouse/partner of the head of the household, only. In addition, cross-national comparisons of employment among mothers may be affected by differences in the treatment of individuals on maternity or parental leave, as explained in indicator LMF1.2.

Finally, there are also some small differences in the age groups used to classify children and partnerships. While for most countries all children aged 0-14 are considered dependent children, in Canada and in the United States this ranges from 0 to 17. For Canada, the mothers partnership status is based on civil status: 'partnered' women are those whose civil status is 'married' or 'living in common-law', and single women are those who are 'separated', 'divorced', 'widowed' or 'single, never married'.

**Sources and further reading:**

OECD (2023), *Joining Forces for Gender Equality: What is Holding us Back?*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [doi.org/10.1787/67d48024-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/67d48024-en).

OECD (2023), *OECD Labour Force Statistics 2022*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [doi.org/10.1787/dc0c92f0-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/dc0c92f0-en).

OECD (2023), *Labour Force Statistics In OECD Countries: Sources, Coverage And Definitions*, [oecd.org/els/emp/LFSNOTES\\_SOURCES.pdf](https://oecd.org/els/emp/LFSNOTES_SOURCES.pdf)