

LMF1.4: Employment profiles over the life-course

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents age-employment profiles for men and women aged between 20 and 65 based on employment rate data for each of the underlying five-year age groups.

'Employment' here refers to the ILO definition, whereby all persons who during a specified reference period were either in paid employment or were self-employed for at least one hour are classified as 'employed'. The employment rate is defined as the proportion of the population in each five-year age group that is employed.

Key findings

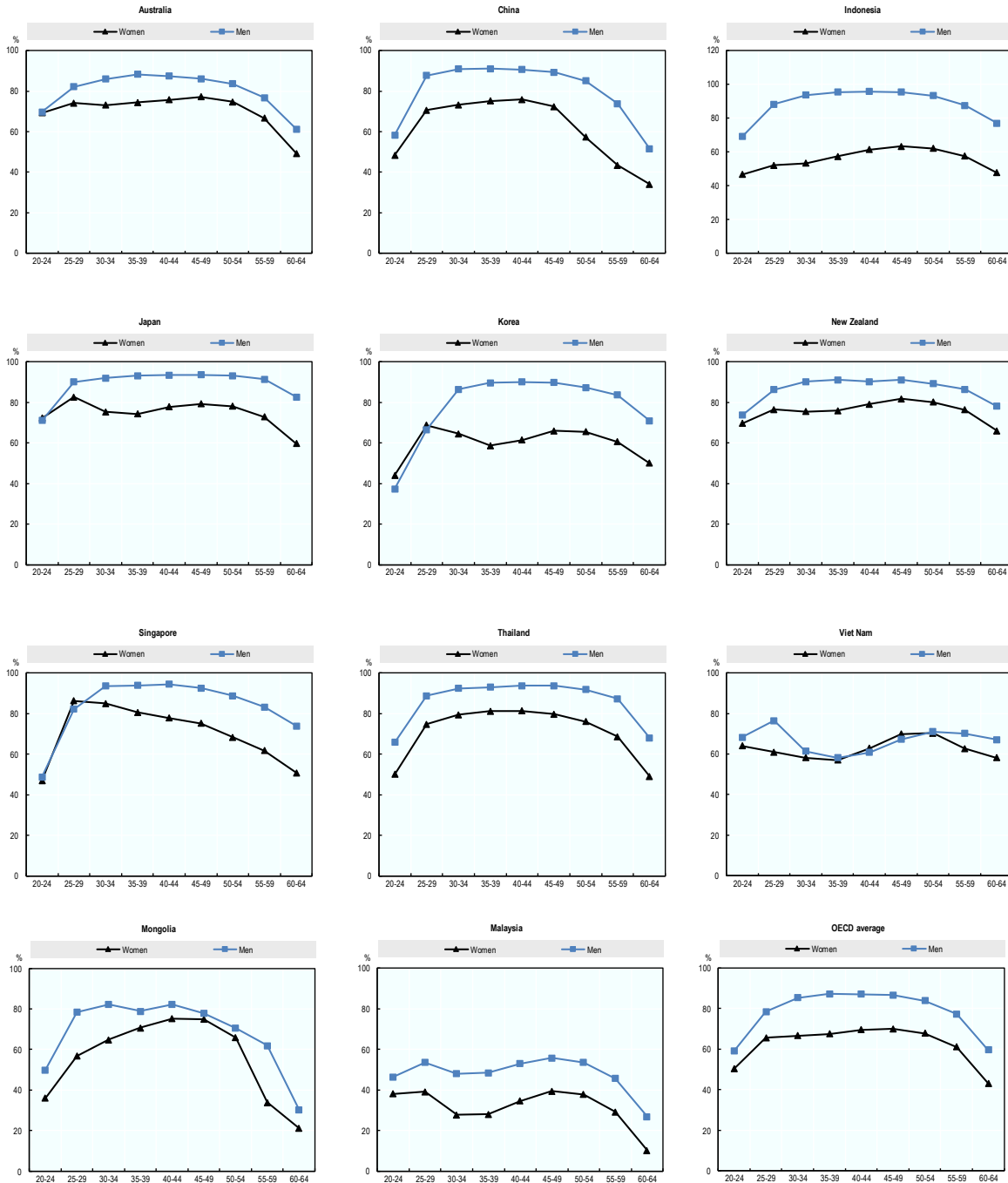
Age-employment profiles – as shown in Chart LMF1.4.A for all covered Asia/Pacific countries, plus also the OECD as a whole – illustrate patterns of employment and labour market entry and exit over the life course. In the Asia/Pacific region, as in many countries worldwide, men's and women's patterns of employment often differ considerably, largely on account of the differential effects of various life events such as the transition from youth to adulthood, marriage, parenthood, and the approach to retirement. These differences in behaviours not only create gender gaps in the overall level of male and female employment, but also produce different age-employment profiles across age cohorts.

Male age-employment profiles often take the shape of an inverted 'U' (Chart LMF1.4.A). Employment rates tend to be relatively low for young men in their early-20s as many are finishing education or training. Rates usually then increase for men in their late-20s and early-30s and peak at around age 35-39 or 40-44, before stabilising and then declining as retirement approaches at about age 55-59 and especially age 60-64. This inverted U is visible to varying extents across all the covered Asia/Pacific countries, but is perhaps most pronounced in Korea – where employment rates are especially low for young men in their 20s – and in China – where there is a particularly large decline in the likelihood of employment once men reach 60-64.

Female age-employment profiles are much more diverse (Chart LMF1.4.A). In some Asia/Pacific countries (Japan, Korea, and to a lesser extent Australia and New Zealand), the female profile takes on something of an 'M' shape: female employment rates increase initially before declining around the prime years of family formation (30 to 39) and then rebounding at about age 45-49 or 50-54. This is indicative of women exiting the labour force entirely upon parenthood, only to re-join again once their children grow up. However, in some other Asia/Pacific countries (especially Singapore) female employment rates decline steadily from age 30-34 onwards and never rebound, suggesting that many mothers in these countries do not re-enter the labour force even once their children have grown up. In others still (China, and especially Thailand), there is no decline in employment at all around the ages of 30-34 and 35-39, with the female profile instead largely echoing the inverted 'U' shape shown by men, albeit at a slightly lower level.

<i>Other relevant indicators:</i> LMF1.6 Gender differences in employment; LMF2.1 Usual weekly working hours among men and women by broad hours groups

Chart LMF1.4.A. **Age-employment profiles by sex, 2020 or latest available year**
 Employment-to-population ratios (%) by country, sex, and five-year age group



Note: Data for China refer to 2015, for Viet Nam to 2018, for Indonesia, Malaysia and Mongolia to 2019.

Sources: [Australia](#), [Indonesia](#), [Japan](#), [Korea](#), [New Zealand](#) and [OECD total](#): [OECD Employment Database](#); China: 1% National Population Sample Survey; [Singapore](#): [Ministry of Manpower, Labour Force Survey](#); [Thailand](#): [National Statistical Office, Labour Force Survey](#).

Comparability and data issues

All the data used in this indicator are taken from national labour force surveys or, in the case of China, from the national population census. Organisations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) set out and define numerous [standards and guidelines](#) that should be followed by countries when conducting labour force surveys and producing labour statistics, which should help reduce comparability issues. Still, a couple of issues remain:

- The data on employment used in this indicator cover people who were employed during the survey reference period only, and do not cover people who were not in-work but who were actively looking for a job (i.e. unemployed). As a result, the age-employment profiles shown here may reflect at least in part the ability of individuals (of a given age and gender, and in a given country) to actually find a job, in addition to their willingness to work and participate in the labour market. Differences in unemployment rates across ages, genders and countries could have some effect on the extent of economic activity.
- The data on employment-to-population ratios used in this indicator are based on head counts only, and do not account for differences in work intensity (e.g. different weekly working hours). Cross-national differences in the hours worked by men and women may also have a substantial effect on gender differences in the extent of economic activity (see Indicators LMF1.6 and LMF2.1).

Sources and further reading: International Labour Organization (2020), *Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2020: Navigating the crisis towards a human-centred future of work*, https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_764084/lang--en/index.htm; International Labour Organization (2021), *World Employment and Social Outlook 2021: Trends 2021*, https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/trends2021/WCMS_795453/lang--en/index.htm.