

## Daily chart - Iceland leads the way to women's equality in the workplace | Graphic detail

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### Glass-ceiling index

Environment for working women, 2019 or latest, 100=best



Sources: European Institute for Gender Equality; Eurostat; MSCI ESG Research; GMAC; ILO; Inter-Parliamentary Union; OECD; national sources; *The Economist*

The Economist

But as our latest ranking shows, there is still progress to be made

IN 1920 America granted women the constitutional right to vote. A century on, women still face frustrating barriers to equality. To mark International Women's Day on March 8th, *The Economist* has updated its glass-ceiling index, which ranks 29 countries on ten indicators of equality for women in the workplace: educational attainment, labour-force participation, pay, child-care costs, maternity and paternity rights, business-school applications, and representation in senior jobs (in management positions, on company boards and in parliament).

This year Iceland tops our ranking, overtaking both Norway and Sweden. Like its Nordic neighbours, Iceland is particularly good at helping women excel in the classroom (more than half earn a university degree) and guaranteeing access to corporate boards (women hold nearly half of the country's board seats, thanks to a mandatory quota of 40% which came into effect in 2013). Women also make up 50% of the Icelanders who take the GMAT, the de facto business-school entrance exam. With so many women aspiring for careers in business, it is little wonder they hold 41.5% of management positions in the country. On this measure only Poland, at 42.5%, ranks higher.

At the bottom of our ranking is South Korea, with Japan not far above. This is the eighth year in a row that South Korea has come last. Just 59% of South Korean women are in the workforce, below the average of 65% for the OECD, a club of mainly rich countries. Those who do work earn, on average, 35% less per year than men, the widest wage gap in the group. Climbing the corporate ladder, meanwhile, is a struggle: women hold just one in seven management positions and one in 30 board seats.

What explains these dismal figures? The country's male-dominated parliament (women make up only 17% of the National Assembly) may play a role. Studies have shown that female legislators are more likely to pass laws that benefit women in the workplace, such as generous parental leave. Many countries with a high number of women in government also have generous child-care policies. In Sweden, where women hold half of the cabinet posts and nearly half of all seats in parliament, new mums are guaranteed 35 weeks of leave. In Finland, which also boasts a near-even gender split in parliament as well as a female prime minister, both parents will soon enjoy 30 weeks of paid leave each. Spain, which also has a strong female presence in government, will give parents a total of 32 weeks from next year.

Where legislatures are lopsidedly male, parental leave tends to be meagre. In Britain women constitute only a third of MPs and parental leave for both parents combined amounts to just 12 weeks, less than a third of the OECD average. In America, where less than a quarter of lawmakers in the House of Representatives are female, there is no federally mandated parental leave at all. In both America and Britain, moreover, child-care costs are more than twice the OECD average, partly owing to weak support from the state.

The theme for this year's International Women's Day is "I Am Generation Equality". But, as our index demonstrates, there is still a long way to go.