



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Plenary sitting

A7-0317/2011

29.9.2011

REPORT

on the situation of single mothers
(2011/2049(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Rapporteur: Barbara Matera

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	11
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE	13

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the situation of single mothers (2011/2049(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 14(3), 23, 24 and 33 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),
- having regard to Article 5 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- having regard to Articles 7, 8, 16, 17, 27 and 30 of the European Social Charter (revised) of the Council of Europe,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 October 2008 entitled ‘A better work-life balance: stronger support for reconciling professional, private and family life’, (COM(2008)0635),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 21 September 2010 entitled ‘Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015’ (COM(2010)0491),
- having regard to the Commission report of 3 October 2008 on the implementation of the Barcelona objectives concerning childcare facilities for pre-school-age children (COM(2008)0638),
- having regard to the Commission report on equality between women and men 2010 (COM(2009)0694),
- having regard to the Commission Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market of 3 October 2008,
- having regard to the European Pact for Equality between women and men for the period 2011-2020,
- having regard to the EU Platform against Social Exclusion,
- having regard to the Eurofound report of 24 March 2010 entitled ‘Second European Quality of Life Survey: Family life and work’,
- having regard to its resolution of 22 September 2005 on women and poverty in the

European Union¹,

- having regard to its resolution of 3 February 2009 on non-discrimination based on sex and intergenerational solidarity²,
- having regard to its resolution of 17 June 2010 on gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis³,
- having regard to its resolution of 17 June 2010 on assessment of the results of the 2006-2010 Roadmap for Equality between women and men, and forward-looking recommendations⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2011 on towards adequate, sustainable and safe European pensions systems⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2010 ⁶,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on the face of female poverty in the European Union ⁷,
- having regard to its position at first reading of 20 October 2010 on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding ⁸,
- having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A7-0317/2011),

General situation

- A. whereas owing to socio-cultural changes which have been accompanied by access to the job market and greater financial independence for women, the two-parent family model and the notion of motherhood only after marriage have become eroded and single mothers are becoming increasingly significant as a group in all advanced and industrialised countries; whereas an increasing number of women are freely opting for motherhood while remaining unattached;

¹ OJ C 233E, 28.9.2006, p. 130.

² Texts adopted, P6_TA(2009)0039.

³ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0231.

⁴ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0232.

⁵ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0058.

⁶ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0085.

⁷ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0086.

⁸ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0373.

- B. whereas disproportionate attention is paid to teenage parenthood as a route into parenting alone, painting an inaccurate picture of who single parents are; whereas damaging and inaccurate stereotypes erode single parents' confidence and self-esteem and that of their children;
- C. whereas single-parent families do not form a homogeneous group, but cover a very wide range of family, financial and social situations;
- D. whereas the living conditions of certain categories of single mother nevertheless make them vulnerable, something which might have consequences for their offspring;
- E. whereas single mothers are becoming increasingly significant as a group in all advanced and industrialised countries, whether as a result of divorce, separation or never having been married, and whereas there is therefore a need to respond to this new reality by adapting policies;
- F. whereas the Member States have a responsibility to ensure reasonable conditions for single mothers and their children;
- G. whereas public policies in many Member States are still not adapted to different family models and situations, and whereas single parents are often still socially and economically disadvantaged;
- H. whereas in many societies the choice to become an unmarried mother is not discredited or stigmatised as in societies dominated for various reasons by patriarchal models;
- I. whereas the vast majority of single parents in Europe are women; whereas in 2001 an average of 85 % of single parents were mothers aged 25 to 64, meaning that 5 % of the overall female population were single mothers and that in some Member States single mothers accounted for 6 to 7.5 % (the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovenia) and in others even for 9 % (Estonia, Latvia);
- J. whereas attitudes to single mothers and the policies pursued in this area vary from one region to the next throughout Europe, creating a geographical imbalance whereby northern regions have stronger welfare systems, southern regions depend on the role of the extended family and eastern regions are marked by a mixture of the two;
- K. whereas, as a result of different public policies and legal statuses (divorced, separated, unmarried or widowed), single mothers experience different situations and benefit, depending on the country in which they live, from different types of allocation, including health services for themselves and their children;
- L. whereas single mothers often interrupt their education and acquisition of professional skills, because their limited time and resources are spent on bringing up their children, so that they also face the risk of social exclusion and poverty;
- M. whereas education and information about the sexual and reproductive rights of women, in particular younger women, are essential to avoid unwanted pregnancies;

- N. whereas women who have lost their partner as a result of violence, including gender violence, terrorism and organised crime, are more vulnerable to isolation from society and therefore need special attention in order to stimulate their reintegration in society and guidance in continuing their parental role in a way which is best for the child;
- O. whereas at European level the responsible authorities are introducing measures and programmes to assist these categories;
- P. whereas many factors influence how children develop in single-parent families, whereas most children brought up by a single parent grow up to do well, and whereas the factors that influence how children develop are far more complex than family type;
- Q. whereas decisions around family policy should prioritise the needs and best interests of the child, and ensure that children can thrive;

Employment of single mothers

- R. whereas 69 % of single mothers are present in the labour market and whereas in 2001 an average of 18 % of single mothers worked part-time;
- S. whereas these part-time solutions and the underemployment of single mothers are often not voluntary, but determined by family constraints;
- T. whereas the maternal employment rate, particularly in the case of the single mothers, is improved by the provision of good childcare services, but whereas it should also be combined with other complementary measures, including good maternity leave and flexible working arrangements, which encourages higher participation, as well as contributing to mother and child well-being;
- U. whereas men with children tend to work more than men without children, while the opposite is true of women; whereas the gender pay gap, which on average is 18% in the EU, enlarges when women become mothers and is carried on into retirement;

Risk of poverty and social exclusion

- V. whereas single-parent households are more vulnerable to the risk of poverty and the reproduction of poverty than dual-parents households; whereas, according to the most recent data available in 2006, 32 % of single-parent households in the EU-25 were at risk of poverty as against 12 % of couples with children;
- W. whereas a larger percentage of women than men are likely to face a risk of financial insecurity mainly because of their labour market conditions, including a higher unemployment rate, lower wages and part-time or lower-quality jobs, a situation which affects single mothers without income more acutely;
- X. whereas the risk of poverty amongst children from single-parent families (19%) is higher than that of the general population, and whereas childcare provision contributes to reducing poverty, including child poverty, and to increasing social inclusion;

Combining family and professional life

- Y. whereas access to the labour market and career opportunities are highest between the ages of 25 and 40, when children are still young and require more care and time from their parents; whereas there is a lack of quality, affordable childcare facilities, and whereas working hours are often incompatible with the opening hours of childcare centres and schools, which are often the biggest obstacle and constraint in combining family and professional life;
- Z. whereas single parents confront twice the difficulties of dual-parent families since they cannot share daily care responsibilities;
- AA. whereas the provision of quality, affordable childcare services plays an extremely important role for single mothers and their children, especially for the category of 0-2-year-olds; whereas the use of formal childcare arrangements for the category of 0-2-year-olds varies from 73% in Denmark to only 2% in the Czech Republic and Poland, and whereas only a few EU Member States (Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and the UK) have already met the Barcelona targets (the provision of childcare for 33% of children under 3 years old);
- AB. whereas the expectation of all women, including single mothers, should be access to the labour market as the only means of escaping vulnerability and poverty; whereas the public authorities should accordingly make every effort to achieve this;

General situation

1. Calls for greater attention to be paid to the situation of single mothers; encourages the Member States to adopt public policies, including educational policies, care provision, health policies, employment policies, social security systems, and housing policy, to support the needs and realities of single-parent families, taking particular account of the reality of single-mothers families;
2. Calls on the Commission and the Members States to support the work of all organisations and informal networks working for single mothers, especially in countries where there is little or no specific support for single-parents families; this support should not replace welfare state support in protecting single mothers in the Member States, since, in view of the geographical and cultural differences existing between the Member States as regards State support to single mothers, no one model can fit all; calls on the Member-State authorities to include aid programmes for those affected;
3. Encourages the work of, and the exchange of best practices between, all organisations and informal networks working for single mothers, especially in countries where there is little or no specific support for single-parents families; encourages work designed to help single mothers; takes the view that these efforts should be aimed at enhancing the self-reliance and independence of single mothers, reducing their feelings of passivity and isolation, improving their social resourcefulness, improving their parenting skills and giving them easier access to information on employment rights and opportunities;
4. Calls for increased gender-focused strategies, which can provide a greater understanding

of the relationship between gender and poverty, and an investment in projects that take on the needs of one-parent families;

5. Calls on the Member States to encourage associations working in support of single mothers to provide training courses aimed at facilitating employment for single mothers and helping to raise their self-esteem; in this connection, calls on the Member States to encourage the setting up of family centres providing temporary accommodation, where single mothers can obtain advice and education; encourages the national authorities to include specific training programmes for single mothers in order to facilitate their access to the labour market, and to collaborate with associations seeking to achieve this objective;
6. Encourages the development of online and interpersonal chat forums, blogs and telephone help lines aimed directly at single mothers, in order to reduce their isolation and allow them to exchange advice, information and best practices based on their individual needs, along with the introduction of telephone help lines or free phone numbers that make it easier to put them in contact with social services;
7. Urges the Member States to identify common policies based on the exchange of best practice in Europe;
8. Encourages the development of support mechanisms, including training courses to support single mothers by providing them with advice on the best ways of dealing with the difficult task of raising a child as a single parent while providing the child with a balanced life rhythm;
9. Calls on the Member States and their administrations to encourage the development of parental training courses to prepare and teach young single parents without economic resources, enabling them to deal more effectively with the job of raising a child;
10. Calls on the Member States to strengthen the role of the national equality bodies as regards discriminatory practices against single mothers in the workplace;
11. Recommends that the Member States provide housing assistance and temporary residence solutions, especially for single mothers who have had to leave foster care because of their age;
12. Urges the Commission and the Member States to take into account the specific circumstances faced by single mothers in different European countries and to provide special assistance for single mothers belonging to the most vulnerable categories;

Employment of single mothers

13. Underlines the need to facilitate access – by funding through the European Social Fund and Member States – to training, vocational training and specific scholarships for single mothers (unmarried, widowed or separated), and underlines especially the importance of encouraging young pregnant women not to stop their education, since it will enable them to obtain qualifications and maximise their chances of having decent working conditions, getting well paid jobs and gaining financial independence, this being the only guarantee of

escaping poverty;

14. Invites the Commission, while developing the framework of programmes such as Progress and Equal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework, to consider awareness-raising programmes for greater participation by certain economically fragile social groups, such as single mothers, and to encourage their involvement,
15. Encourages Member States to analyse carefully the phenomenon of underemployment of single mothers and to take appropriate steps to tackle this problem;
16. Stresses the need to provide sufficient high-quality services for the care of children and other dependants at affordable prices compatible with full-time employment, to grant privileged access to them for single mothers and to facilitate significantly access to training and the search for employment for single mothers and improve their chance of remaining in work; supports the creation of company childcare facilities with flexible opening hours; insists that Member States ensure access to childcare facilities by aiming to provide the conditions for 50% of necessary care for 0-3-year-olds and 100% of care for 3-6 year-olds;
17. Stresses the need for Member States to introduce more provisions that aim at raising maternal employment, as it is the most effective way of improving income and therefore a way to reduce the chances of poverty or social exclusion of single mothers;
18. Stresses the importance of pursuing employment policies to encourage the recruitment of single mothers and prevent unjustified dismissals;
19. Encourages Member States to provide tax deductions and other financial incentives to companies that employ single parents and/or create, operate and provide on-site childcare facilities and services to employees;

Risk of poverty and social exclusion

20. Encourages the Member States to share best practices in supporting single-parent families, especially in the context of the financial crisis, which is worsening the situation for single parents;
21. Invites Member States, in cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality, to examine the specific needs of single mothers, to collect data and analyse them, to consider setting up concrete measures to address those issues and to exchange best practices to improve them;
22. Urges the Member States to take actions and measures designed to prevent single mothers from being at permanent risk of poverty and social exclusion;
23. Calls on the Member States to ensure that single mothers benefit from housing support and that they are given priority concerning waiting lists for renting houses;
24. Asks the Member States to guarantee equal treatment and to maintain a high quality of life for all children regardless of the marital status of their parents *or their family*

circumstances, by providing universal allowances in order to not pass poverty on to the child;

25. Asks the Member States to establish measures that eliminate discrimination towards single mothers and their children, and therefore welcomes the use of programmes that provide state aid and scholarships for their children;
26. Encourages the Member States to introduce policies aimed at providing financial support for single-parent families in the form of a one-parent benefit, tax deductions for single-parent households or other fiscal deductions for single parents appropriate to their national legislation as well as training aid for single carers;
27. Asks the Member States to ensure that allowances (child support) from non-custodial parents are paid regularly;
28. Encourages Member States to take into account the gender factor and especially the situation of single mothers during the reform of their pension systems;

Combining family and professional life

29. Underlines the fact that the Member States and public and private organisations should give priority to work-life balance by introducing more family-friendly working conditions such as flexible working hours and teleworking and by developing child facilities, nurseries etc.;
30. Stresses that in order to facilitate work-life balance for single mothers, greater involvement of fathers is necessary; notes in this regard that shared *care* is almost non-existent in some Member States;
31. Urges that, in accordance with the principle of equal opportunities, all initiatives and actions in favour of single mothers be extended also to single fathers;
32. Urges the Commission and the Member States to compile comparative data on this subject at EU level and on the various prevailing trends, with a view also to comparing welfare provisions and systems;
33. Takes the view that those who devote their time and skills to looking after and bringing up children or caring for the elderly should receive social recognition, and whereas this could be achieved by granting such people entitlements in their own right, particularly as regards social security and pensions,
34. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Single Motherhood is an often overlooked demographic category since it is very difficult to place a face to the issue. Encompassing ages spanning over forty years and including all socioeconomic backgrounds, single motherhood lacks an identifiable, visible lobby that can advocate for all single mothers since policies affect each mother differently. Geographically across Europe one can see a difference in the perceptions and policies towards of Single Mothers. In the Southern Mediterranean States (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece) it is generally accepted that extended family will assist in the raising of single parent children on a voluntary basis without reimbursement. In the Northern and Nordic States (France, Sweden, Germany, Denmark) government welfare systems are in place to offer single mothers benefits and social assistance policies. In the Eastern European Member States there is a general mix of policies, some holding onto strong familial values from the Communist Regimes and others having a mix of the Northern and Southern European policies. While the geographic distributions along with the age and socioeconomic divisions already make it difficult for single mothers to organise and lobby, the stigma that many view single motherhood with: a temporary situation that can change once a single mother finds a new partner makes it even more challenging to be a Single Mother in Europe.

Presently five percent of the European females are Single Mothers. Single Motherhood is often falsely stigmatised as consisting of only irresponsible teenagers while in truth 85% of all single parents in Europe are single mothers between the ages of 25 and 64. With the negative effects felt on the entire European community from the economic and financial crisis women have been especially hard hit. This impact has been even more severe on large majority of Single Mothers in their prime working years (25-40).

Already saddled by the Gender Pay Gap, European Single Mothers are additionally hampered by the difficult choice between taking on debt and caring for their children. In addition to the high unemployment rates for single mothers, the cyclical nature of poverty strongly affects the dependent children of single mothers. These children have fewer resources to succeed in education thus creating fewer opportunities to enter the workforce at a competitive level.

The health status of Single Mothers is also statistically more unstable than those of mothers in dual parent families. Single Mothers are under more stress since they singlehandedly perform the tasks normally performed by two parents. Often they cannot afford adequate medical care nor receive properly rest.

Statistically Single Mothers throughout Europe are less educated than their married counterparts. This hindrance is especially burdensome because for young unqualified Single Mothers because a chance at employment is highly unlikely without education leaving them unqualified for jobs later in life since they lack practical working experience. Additionally many of the jobs available for Single Mothers are only of the part time and underpaid variety making it very difficult to ensure a balanced life style for their children or to move up within the working world.

Ways to combat the inequalities that Single Mothers face in Europe

It is imperative that with this report the different Member States address the issue of Single Motherhood by investing and promoting research the issue. In doing so they should take advantage of the newly created European Institute for Gender Equality in Vilnius. Additionally through their individual research findings, Member States should initiate in dialogues with other Member States to share and learn the best implementation practices and solutions.

Encourage national policies that will guarantee indirect subsidies through the purchase of food. Food stamps present an opportunity for Member States to fight against poverty's cyclical nature by giving financial support to single mothers.

Provide tax credits for Single Parents such as the existing procedures in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK.

Health Care benefits should be afforded to Single Mothers along with their dependent children to counteract the lack of two parent providers. A European incentive to Member State's who provide healthcare for mothers and children with incomes below the national income would be a positive step.

Europe should provide tax breaks and incentives to companies that provide on-site day care and nursery facilities which allow Single Mothers to work while their children are being watched after and taught. Additionally breaks should be provided to companies that provide training courses to Single Mothers on the complex status of managing being a mother and a worker. An example of similar practice that can be implemented by other Member States is the case of the Netherlands in which childhood assistance is free for Single Mothers.

Flexible job opportunities such as part-time work, tele-jobs, and e-jobs should be offered on local, national, and EU levels for Single Mothers to reconcile their private and professional lives.

Affordable Housing priority should be given to Single Mothers .

Extra unemployment benefits should be allocated to Single Mothers accordingly for each child under their custody. Member States can use Germany as a model for implementation of this as they already have increased unemployment benefits for Single Mothers with dependent children.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	15.9.2011
Result of final vote	+: 26 -: 0 0: 4
Members present for the final vote	Regina Bastos, Edit Bauer, Andrea Češková, Tadeusz Cymański, Edite Estrela, Ilda Figueiredo, Iratxe García Pérez, Zita Gurmai, Mary Honeyball, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Constance Le Grip, Barbara Matera, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Siiri Oviir, Antonyia Parvanova, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Britta Thomsen, Marina Yannakoudakis, Anna Záborská
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Jill Evans, Christa Klaß, Kartika Tamara Liotard, Mariya Nedelcheva, Katarína Neved'alová, Norica Nicolai, Antigoni Papadopoulou, Joanna Senyszyn