

P7_TA(2011)0458

Situation of single mothers

European Parliament resolution of 25 October 2011 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 Commission Recommendation 2008/867/EC of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market,
- 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 13 October 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

¹ OJ C 233 E, 28.9.2006, p. 130.

intergenerational solidarity¹,

- having regard to its resolution of 17 June 2010 on gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis²,
- 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 recommendations³,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2011 on towards adequate, sustainable and safe European pensions systems⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2010⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on the face of female poverty in the European Union⁶,
- 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 breastfeeding⁷,
- 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;
- 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

¹ OJ C 67 E, 18.3.2010, p. 31.

² OJ C 236 E, 12.8.2011, p. 79.

³ OJ C 236 E, 12.8.2011, p. 87.

⁴ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0058.

⁵ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0085.

⁶ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0086.

⁷ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0373.

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 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,

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34. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.