

Situation of single mothers

2011/2049(INI) - 15/09/2011

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report by Barbara MATERA (EPP, IT) on the situation of single mothers. It notes that 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 %. Whilst Member States have a responsibility to ensure reasonable conditions for single mothers and their children, public policies in many Member States are still not adapted to different family models, and single parents are often still socially and economically disadvantaged.

The committee encourages 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. It asks the Commission and Member 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-parent 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.

The report also asks Member States:

- 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;
- to strengthen the role of the national equality bodies as regards discriminatory practices against single mothers in the workplace;
- to provide housing assistance and temporary residence solutions, especially for single mothers who have had to leave foster care because of their age.

Employment of single mothers: noting that 69% of single mothers are present in the labour market and in 2001 an average of 18 % of single mothers worked part-time, Members stress the importance of pursuing employment policies to encourage the recruitment of single mothers and prevent unjustified dismissals. They underline 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. The report stresses especially the importance of encouraging young pregnant women not to stop their education, since it will enable them to gain financial independence, this being the only guarantee of escaping poverty. The Commission is invited to consider awareness-raising programmes for greater participation by single mothers while developing the framework of programmes such as Progress and Equal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Members also stress 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. They support the creation of company childcare facilities with flexible opening hours. The committee 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. It also 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: pointing out that 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, Members encourage 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. Member States are called upon to:

- examine the specific needs of single mothers, and consider setting up concrete measures
- address those issues and to exchange best practices to improve them, in cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- ensure that allowances (child support) from non-custodial parents are paid regularly;
- 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: the report underlines that the provision of quality, affordable childcare services plays an extremely important role for single mothers and their children, but only a few Member States have already met the Barcelona targets (the provision of childcare for 33% of children under 3 years old). 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. The committee stresses that greater involvement of fathers is necessary, but that shared care is almost non-existent in some Member States, and all initiatives in favour of single mothers should be extended also to single fathers. The Commission and Member States are asked 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.