



Single parents and employment in Europe

Short statistical report No.3

Contract ref. no. JUST/2011/GEND/PR/1081/A4

April 2014



Justice

This publication is commissioned by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013).

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ISBN 978-92-79-36171-5

doi: 10.2838/54302

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Single parents and employment in Europe

Short Statistical Report No. 3

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RR-362-EC

April, 2014

Prepared for European Commission Directorate General- Justice and Fundamental Rights
JUST/2011/GEND/PR/1081/A4

Preface

This paper examines the key characteristics of single parents through descriptive and comparative perspectives. Our analyses suggest that the experiences and needs of single-parent households differ according to the age of both the parent and child, and that the vast majority of such households are single-mother households. The analysis shows that younger mothers and mothers with young children are the least-employed parent groups, and that this is exacerbated for single mothers. This is relevant to policy considerations, as the age composition of single-parent households also differs from nation to nation.

This short statistical report is part of a series of reports on gender equality in the workforce and the reconciliation of work, family and private life. These reports have been commissioned by the Justice Directorate General of the European Commission. The study was jointly undertaken by RAND Europe and the University of Groningen. These reports should be of interest to policy makers and academics with an interest in improving gender equality in the workforce and improving the compatibility of combining a career with a family and personal life.

RAND Europe is an independent not-for-profit policy research organisation that aims to improve policy- and decision-making in the public interest, through research and analysis. The research group led by Professor Melinda Mills at the University of Groningen focuses on research in the area of cross-national comparative research, gender equality, work-family reconciliation and advanced statistical analysis.

This report has been peer-reviewed in accordance with RAND's quality assurance standards. The authors wish to thank the peer reviewers Gerda Neyer (Stockholm University) and Sunil Patil (RAND Europe) for their comments on earlier versions of this document. For more information about RAND Europe or this study, please contact Stijn Hoorens (hoorens@rand.org).

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List of Abbreviations

EU-27, acceding state, candidate countries and additional countries:

	Country	ISO Code
<i>EU 27 Member States</i>	Belgium	BE
	Bulgaria	BG
	Czech Republic	CZ
	Denmark	DK
	Germany	DE
	Estonia	EE
	Ireland	IE
	Greece	GR
	Spain	ES
	France	FR
	Italy	IT
	Cyprus	CY
	Latvia	LV
	Lithuania	LT
	Luxembourg	LU
	Hungary	HU
	Malta	MT
	Netherlands	NL
	Austria	AT
	Poland	PL
	Portugal	PT
	Romania	RO
	Slovenia	SI
	Slovakia	SK
	Finland	FI
	Sweden	SE
	United Kingdom	UK
<i>New Member State*</i>	Croatia	HR
<i>Candidate countries</i>	Montenegro	ME
	Iceland	IS
	FYR Macedonia	MK
	Turkey	TR
<i>Additional countries</i>	Norway	NO
	Switzerland	CH

* The analysis of this report was conducted before Croatia joined the EU.

1. Context

The purpose of this short descriptive paper is to outline single-parent employment in Europe as part of a series of papers on work-life balance using large international datasets. As described below, the data used in this study comes from the 2010 Labour Force Survey (LFS), which was carried out in 30 countries.

1.1. Background

As described in previous reports in this series, there has been a significant change in the number of women entering the labour force across Europe, which has thus created new challenges of balancing paid work and family obligations. Related policies have experienced a concurrent shift, focusing on female employment and childcare provision, though many gaps still remain (Kok, 2004; Kohler et al., 2006). Additionally, over the past decades the proportion of single-parent households has increased in the EU, which is primarily composed of single-*mother* homes (Andersson, 2002; Unicef 2007). This is of particular interest to policymakers as single parents are considered to be a major risk group for living in poverty (van Stolck et al, 2011; European Commission 2007). McLanahan (2004) showed that across Western industrialised countries, single-mother households have a much higher poverty rate than two-parent households.

Unicef's *State of the Children 2005* states that 'Higher employment rates among women (including those who are single parents) have contributed to reducing child poverty in the 1990s in a number of OECD countries' (Unicef, 2005, 31). Unfortunately, single parenthood can constrain an adult's opportunity to pursue full-time work if services or support are not available to provide childcare or after-school care and other resources, to meet the many needs of households with children (Bird & Rieker, 2008). Because single parenthood is a phenomenon largely confined to women, this is a central underlying factor contributing to the persistence of gender inequality.

To the extent that single parenthood is a barrier to participation in the labour force and continuous full-time employment, its impact on the risk of poverty may be greatest for single parents with younger children and those who experience a permanent impact on their employability due to a longer period of unemployment or underemployment. Thus the impact of single parenthood may be greater when and where unemployment is high and where the social provisions for parents are lowest (Casey & Maldonado, 2012). For those with very young children the impact may be greater in countries with lower levels of paid parental leave and for parents with less access to full-day childcare programmes, or those who must pay more for such care. However Misra et al (2007) found that while family benefits and childcare for young children unequivocally lower poverty rates, particularly for single mothers, long parental leave has

more ambivalent effects on poverty risk. Single parents may also have a greater need for flexible work hours in order to minimise conflict between parenting demands and paid work.

1.2. Overview of analysis

This paper examines the key characteristics of single parents through descriptive and comparative perspectives. We begin with national employment characteristics for both genders to identify potential differences in parental employment between countries. Next, we look at household composition by parental status and the presence of children. This demonstrates areas where single parents make up a large percentage of households and thus may have particular significance to policymakers. Likewise, the percentage of children by parents with partners and by single parents is reviewed.

We then move onto identifying patterns for parents in labour markets, which may relate to the varying policies that apply in different countries. Using this top-down approach, we can best contextualise the results to the local situations, to first avoid misunderstanding results which may be influenced by larger employment issues, and second to gain a richer understanding of which specific issues need more urgent attention and where. This will help answer the question: What are the key factors affecting the employment status of single parents at the national level across Europe?¹

With the LFS data, we primarily looked at parents in relation to their habitation status: typically with or without partner (irrespective of marital status). Furthermore, unless otherwise stated, children include anyone under the age of 15 living at home and not working. When considering employment, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions were used (as classified in the LFS²) in order to remain consistent with other work done in this series and more widely, which makes use of the same data. The same applied to any variables related to occupation – no additional grouping or classification was done.

In preliminary work on the available data, it was immediately clear that the majority of single-parent families were run by the mother. Whereas in a two-parent household, parents have multiple options such as staggering their work hours to address shorter childcare or school hours than workday hours, single parents face a greater need to work shorter and/or flexible hours in order to accommodate their children's hours, sick days, school breaks and holidays. The points discussed in this paper and previous reports in the series demonstrate the potential challenges of increased female participation in the labour force. These highlight the importance of understanding the wider employment situations for single parents, particularly single mothers, in order to develop effective policies to promote work opportunities which take into account the challenges faced by these groups.

¹ Where there may have been ambiguity in the nature of the relationship between the adults and children (e.g. a household with children and married adults where one adult is not biologically related to the child; two unmarried biological parents; unmarried partners one of whom is a biological parent; or adoptive parents whether or not they are married) we have relied on the coding provided by LFS.

² *Eurostat*. European Commission. As of 10 April 2014:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/EU_labour_force_survey_-_methodology.

1.3. Caveats

There are certain caveats which we would like to emphasise, as they are to be taken into account when interpreting and using the data presented in this paper.

- As the report was intended to focus on single parents and employment, descriptive statistics include only those in the labour market. This was done to avoid potential confounders of not knowing the reason some single parents may not be seeking or in employment. For this reason, some results may appear skewed when compared to other reports about unemployment.
- Disaggregation of data in LFS is not always possible. This has been noted where applicable.
- We have focused on parents with one or more children aged 14 or younger.
- Due to the relatively small numbers of single fathers compared to single mothers and their low numbers in the data, our analyses primarily examines employment of single mothers.
- Due to missing information on children, Denmark, Finland and Sweden are not included in all analyses for this study. Other non-EU countries in LFS that lack the necessary information on children for this study include Switzerland, Norway and Croatia, which are also not included in all analyses.
- Variations in sampling and data collection across countries imply that some variables are missing for some member states, particularly in relation to children. This is particularly true for the single-parent households surveyed, which ranges from three (Malta) to 2,042 (United Kingdom).

2. Key characteristics of households in Europe

The purpose of this section is to outline household composition across the sample. We then determine if there are differences in employment characteristics between different parent groups while looking at the possible indicators for these.

A large body of research has examined the impact of public support for childcare and parental leave on women's employment rates cross-nationally, including a woman's probability of working part-time or full-time and her probable hours of paid work. For example, in their analyses of maternal employment in the 1980s across 14 industrialised countries, Gornick et al. (1996) found that 'In the countries with the most well developed policies – Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France and Sweden – no significant reduction in employment is seen among mothers of infants [compared to similar mothers without children].' For mothers of children under three, they considered the coverage, length and generosity of parental-leave policies, national support for childcare through tax policies and national guarantees of access to public childcare, and enrolments in public or publicly-subsidised childcare. Their findings were similar for mothers of pre-schoolers. Here, they considered government efforts to facilitate employment of mothers with children from the age of three until school enrollment based on public support of childcare (via tax relief and guaranteed access to childcare), as well as the enrollment of children aged three to five in public or publicly-subsidised care and the percentage of five-year-old children in public childcare, pre-primary or primary school.

Similarly, Misra et al. (2010) examined how gender, parenthood and partner's employment impacted upon an individual's rate of part- and full-time employment across 20 developed countries. They argue that gender is less of a salient factor than gendered parenthood in explaining employment rates, in that gender differences in employment are generally much smaller among childless adults than among those with children in the household. They find that both patterns for maternal employment and work hours vary considerably cross-nationally. Finally, they report that the employment hours of childless couples vary far less between nations than those of couples with children. Their findings suggest the need to examine part- and full-time employment and barriers to employment cross-nationally among the growing number of single parents in developed countries.

2.1. Overview of households in LFS

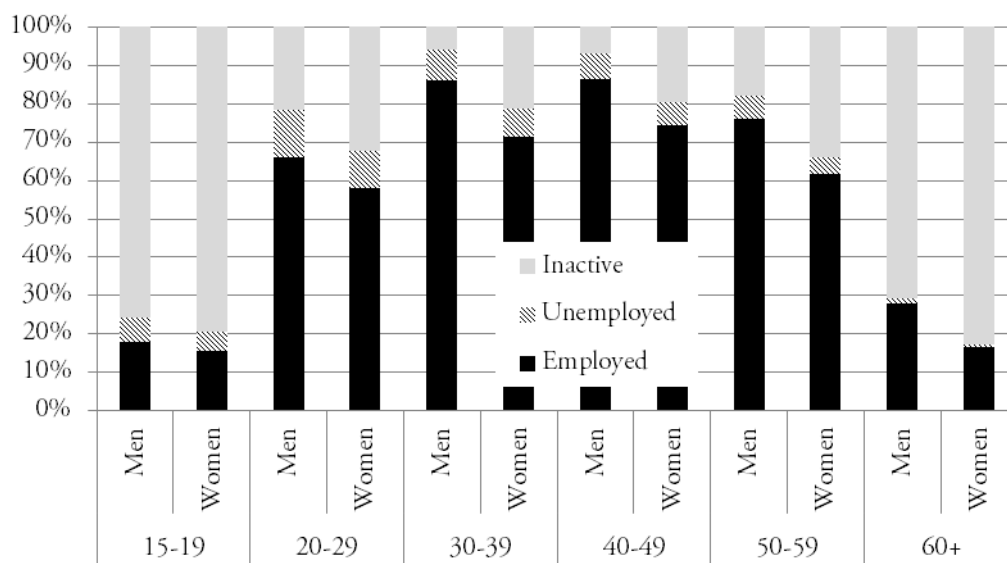
In the first statistical paper (SSR1), the research team have already looked into various related issues, including the difference in the employment rate of parents versus non-parents, the potential link between the employment rate of mothers and full-time formal childcare arrangements, women's reasons for

working or not working part-time, and attitudes towards parental involvement in work and care. In the second report (SSR2), the team examines the participation of parents in the labour market and how it relates to national levels of work and family policies.

For this paper, the primary focus is on single parents and their employment status, as well as possible indicators of, or barriers to, working. The main data source for analysis is the Labour Force Survey (LFS). It will be primarily a descriptive study to outline the household situations and employment status of single parents.³

Within the LFS sample, there are clear differences in the level of participation in the labour force between age groups and, to a lesser extent, between genders. This is most noticeable in the case of young people aged between 15 and 19 years. Figure 1 represents this trend, irrespective of the presence of children, which is both indicative of young people who are still in full-time education as well as reflective of the low employment rates for young people in Europe. In nearly all age groups, there are greater proportions of inactive⁴ women and unemployed men. Inactivity is also greatest for the youngest and oldest, declining from each age group until 50–59, when it increases considerably.

Figure 1. Employment across Europe by age and gender



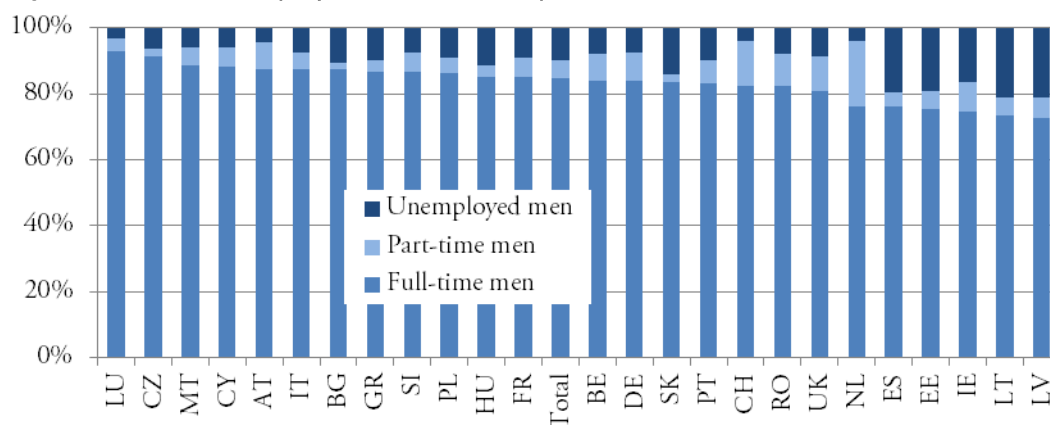
SOURCE: LFS 2010

³ The employment rate in this paper is defined as the proportion of active adults who are in employment. This was done to focus on employment for those intending to work and avoiding potential confounds created by unknown reasons for not engaging or attempting to engage in work. Published employment rates will thus differ from those presented in this report.

⁴ Based on the ILO definition of those outside the labour market (neither employed nor unemployed, thus not seeking work).

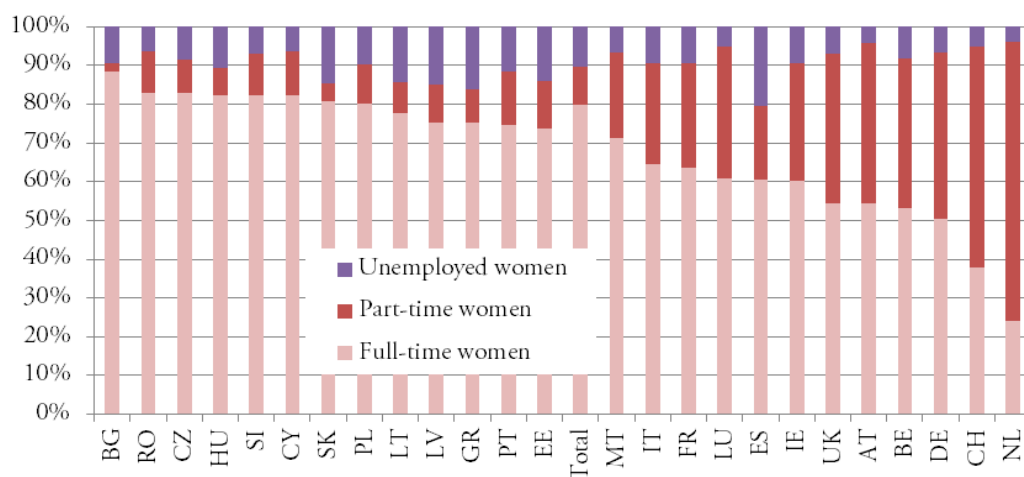
When excluding inactive individuals, 90.5 per cent of adults (irrespective of the presence of children) are currently employed (73.5 per cent full-time), as per the ILO definitions. The rate of employment for men is 90.5 per cent (73.5 per cent full-time) and for women it is 90.6 per cent (61.7 per cent full-time). The employment rates reported in this paper exclude inactive individuals from the employment calculations to avoid exacerbating the results about single parents without fully understanding the reason for the inactivity. This was done to ensure the focus of the analysis was consistent and in line with the stated purpose of analysing single parents and employment. For this reason, it is not possible to directly compare with other standard references which use the common employment rate definition⁵. Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate national employment situations by gender for full-time and part-time work for men and women, respectively.

Figure 2. National employment across Europe for men



SOURCE: LFS 2010

Figure 3. National employment across Europe for women



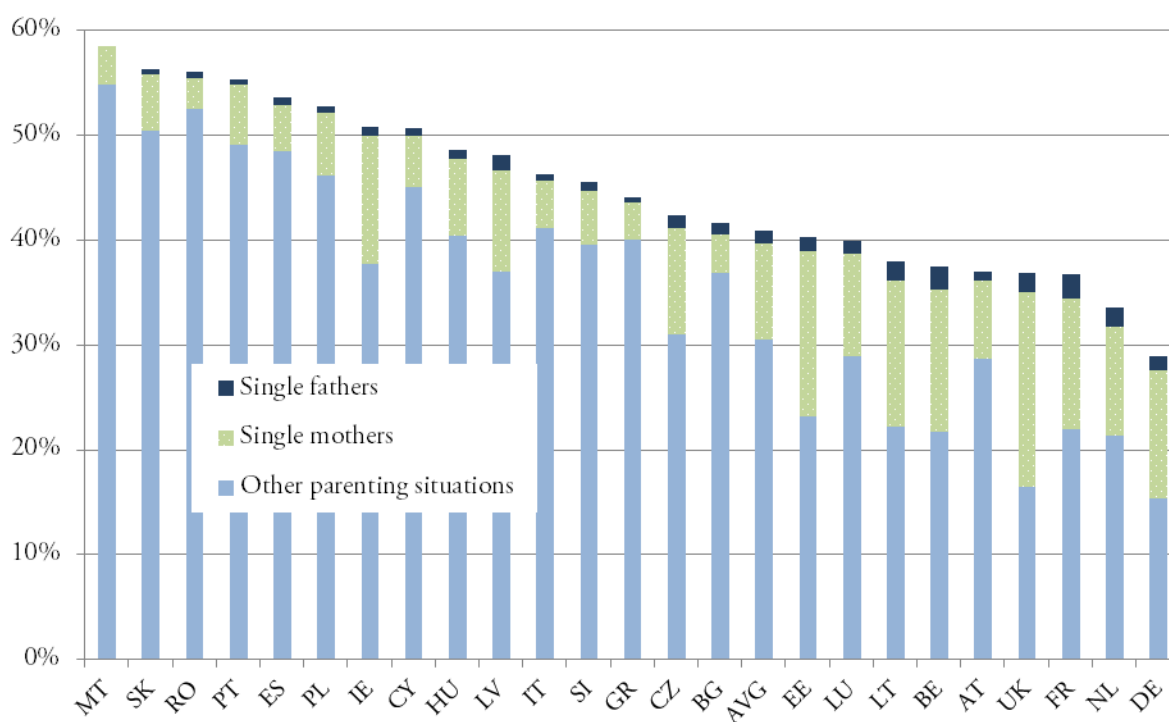
SOURCE: LFS 2010

⁵ Based on the common definition, employment rate was 70.1 per cent for men and 58.5 per cent for women in 2011. (Eurostat 2013)

Given the varied cultural and policy contexts for parents and employment across Europe, this paper identifies the national situations of household composition and labour force participation for single parents. With this information, it is possible to understand where interventions aimed at supporting the return to work of single parents may be needed or may be in place.

Across the countries included in the LFS database where information on children is available, 41 per cent of households have children under the age of 15, ranging from a low of 29 per cent (in Germany) to a high of 58.6 per cent (in Malta). Other studies have noted the lower number of households with children in Germany. For example, a European Commission (2010) report on household structure in the EU, concluded that only 21.2 per cent of households included children under the age of 18 in 2007. The data on Malta is less clear, but analyses of national data also reflect recent increases in the proportion of households with children. According to Malta’s National Statistics Office (2010), in 2007, 36.6 per cent of households included one or more children under the age of 18. By 2010, households with children had increased to 39.6 per cent (National Statistics Office 2012). Figure 4 summarises the 2010 LFS national figures⁶.

Figure 4. Households with children by parenting status, across countries



SOURCE: LFS 2010

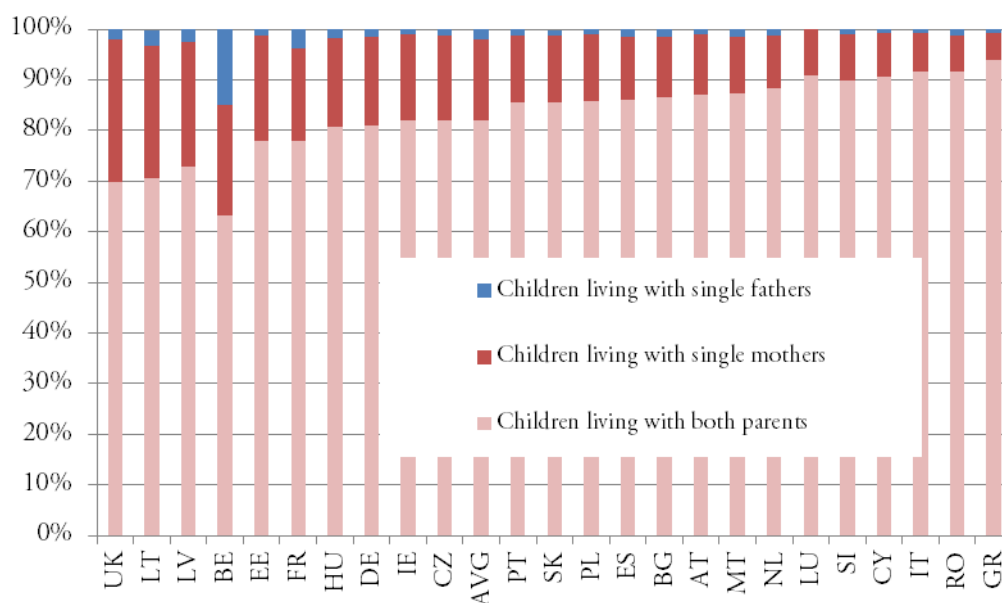
The cross-country variation in the prevalence of single-parent households is much greater than the variation in the prevalence of households with children. Of the 24 countries included, 10.4 per cent of

⁶ “Other parenting situations” refers to households with both parents, two parents (where one is not biological) and those with other guardians, such as grandparents or other carers. In some cases, these are not possible to disaggregate and so have remained cumulative for general overview purposes only.

households with children have single parents, ranging from 3.5 per cent (Romania) to 20.4 per cent (UK). The UK has a noticeably higher rate of single mothers (18.5 per cent of UK households with children are single-mother households) compared to the rest of Europe (9.1 per cent mean; low of 2.9 per cent in Romania). Across these 24 countries, only 1.2 per cent of homes with children are single-father homes, ranging from no reported cases (in Malta) to 2.4 per cent (in France). There is no apparent correlation between single-mother households and single-father households in terms of national percentages.

Across the 24 countries, 81.9 per cent of children live in a household with both their parents, ranging from 63.3 per cent (in Belgium)⁷ to 94 per cent (in Greece). Across Europe, 16 per cent of children come from single-mother homes (from 5.3 per cent in Greece to 28.1 per cent in the UK) and 2.1 per cent from single-father homes (from 0.7 per cent in Cyprus, to 15.1 per cent in Belgium). Figure 5 shows the proportion of children in relation to parental status across Europe. One potential explanation for differences in levels of single-parent households between nations comes from McLaughlin (1999), who suggests that the easing conditions for divorce as well as strengthened legislative protection against domestic violence are likely to have increased the prevalence of single parenthood in countries where such changes have occurred, particularly the UK. In explaining the uneven spread of single parenting, other researchers have pointed to economic factors including men's and women's wages and non-economic factors including changing gender roles, attitudes, and social norms as well as legalisation and availability of reliable contraception and abortion (Ellwood & Jencks, 2004).

Figure 5. Proportion of children by living arrangements based on parental status



SOURCE: LFS 2010

⁷ It is possible that Belgian results are affected due to incomplete cohabitation documents. For Belgium, single parents ("alleenstaande ouders") include both single parents and parents who live together (de facto unions) but have not applied for a cohabitation contract ("samenlevingscontract"). Adults in this category have, in general, a reduced tax burden as well as other specific social/tax benefits (such as child-care tax credit, reduction in property tax, home mortgage deductions). However, this may contribute to the seemingly large number of single-parent homes and to a higher proportion of fathers in Belgium reporting that they are single fathers than is observed for other countries.

3. Single parents and employment

It is particularly important to consider the circumstances of individuals raising children without a partner. The costs and time commitment may be similar in some ways to those parents with partners, but the lack of shared responsibility has an undoubted impact on the ability to provide for dependents while still serving their needs at home. Analyses in this section also exclude inactive individuals.

3.1. Differences in employment rates between single mothers and mothers with partners

For women with children who have a cohabitating spouse or partner, 90.5 per cent are employed (55.4 per cent full-time). For single mothers, 84.1 per cent are employed, with 47.9 per cent employed full-time. Employment for mothers with partners (hereafter we use the term “partners” irrespective of marital status) is higher than the European employment average for all women. Figure 6 represents the difference in employment between mothers with partners and single mothers, across a number of European countries. Across the majority of countries, mothers with partners have noticeably higher rates of participation in the labour force compared to single mothers. This is a critical finding which may explain an increasing socio-economic gap between single parents and those with partners: Mothers with partners are able to share responsibility as well as contribute to household income, whereas single parents are less able to provide even a single source of income.

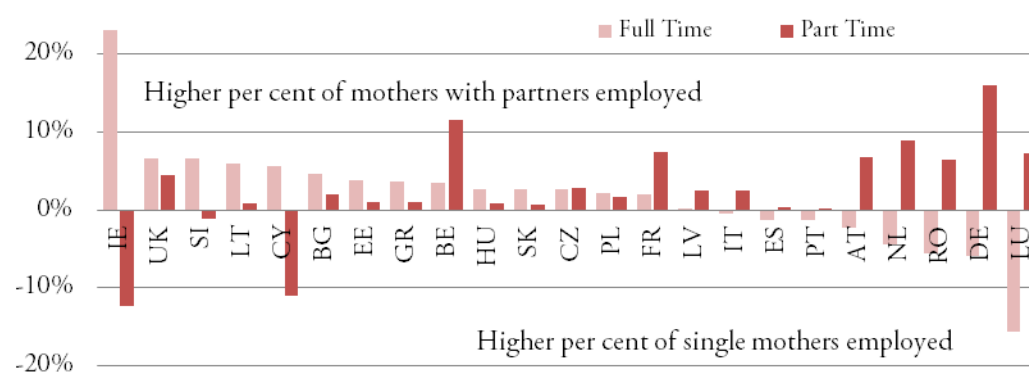
As the following analyses show, there may be a variety of reasons for the differences in employment, including a lower level of education (leading to fewer opportunities or a limiting of occupations, with a higher risk of unemployment); the age of single mothers (greater unemployment among younger people is further compounded by raising children); a lack of suitable jobs (such as those with flexible conditions, located near to home, with sufficient pay); and being viewed as potentially less employable by prospective employers (who may see single parents as an employment liability or risk if hired), though the latter is not addressed in this study.

The ability to share responsibility may be more important for those who have a sick child or other family member with significant care-giving needs (Bird & Rieker 2008). Policymakers should take this into account in seeking ways to help single mothers with the burden of childcare, so that they can enter the workforce at a similar level to those mothers with partners, as well as considering whether additional supports are needed for those caring for a chronically ill family member. This is especially the case for

those countries described in SSR1 as being considerably behind⁸ the Barcelona childcare targets, particularly ensuring that the reasons for being behind are well understood and addressed. Additionally, policies should focus on ensuring, at least, that those children with the lowest socioeconomic status have access to care, as SSR1 and prior work (Almond & Currie 2011; Datta Gupta & Simonsen 2010; Havnes & Mogstad 2011) have shown them to benefit most from access to formal care.

Figure 6 further shows that mothers with partners are also more able to take on part-time work, though perhaps not at significantly different levels. This means that single mothers may have to choose between spending time at home versus providing sufficient income, whilst mothers with partners may be more able to balance these potentially conflicting demands. These findings also confirm previous studies which showed that countries with the most flexible work policies were the ones where single mothers were more likely to work full-time (Plantenga & Remery, 2010).

Figure 6. Difference in employment between mothers with partners and single mothers



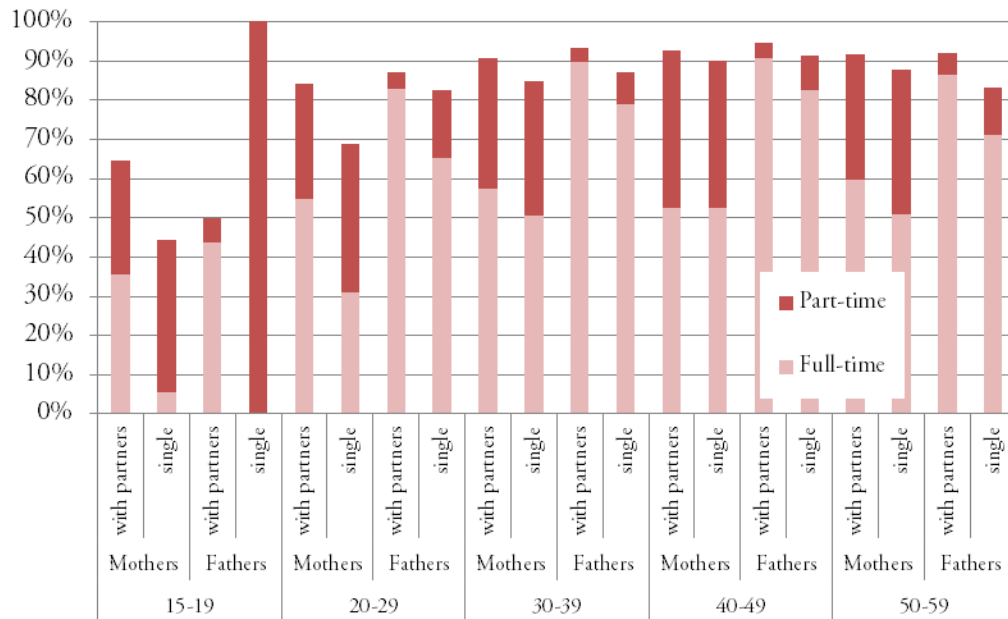
SOURCE: LFS 2010

In order to understand employment over the full course of life, it is also important to consider the parents' age. It is likely that caring for children will compete with the hours which would otherwise be spent in full-time employment, particularly when children are young. For this, Figure 7 shows the employment status of mothers and fathers in relation to parental status within certain age bands. It is worth noting in this analysis that a significantly lower percentage of younger people (under 20) work than in other age groups.⁹ While this may be due to a variety of reasons, it is also reflective of the employment deficits for young people across Europe. However, these results indicate that it may be even more difficult for young single parents to find work, considering as well that inactive young parents have not been taken into account here. For this reason, policies which address employment for single parents should also consider the wider issues of low employment for young people. Likewise, policies addressing youth employment should make special consideration for the added difficulties of young single parents.

⁸ SSR1 identifies Hungary, Malta, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Greece, Bulgaria, Poland and Croatia as countries 'falling behind' the rest of Europe in meeting the Barcelona childcare targets.

⁹ It is important to note that the numbers are small for single fathers ages 15 to 19, thus the high result is not likely to be representative of all young males, nor even likely for all young fathers.

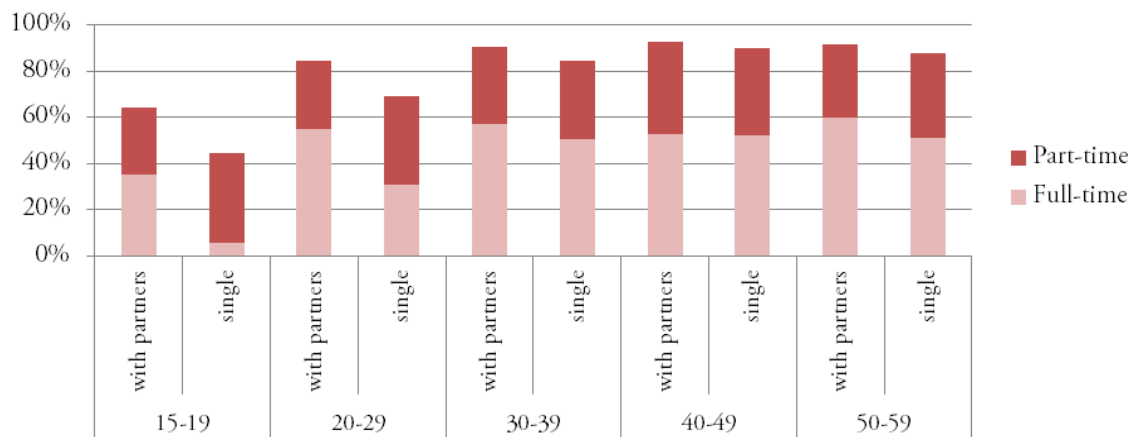
Figure 7. Employment status by age group for mothers and fathers with and without partners



SOURCE: LFS 2010

For ease of interpretation, Figure 8 shows the same information for mothers only. Within each marital status, employment tends to increase with parental age, whereas the proportion of households with very young children tends to decrease with parental age. However, as before, younger mothers are far less likely to engage in full-time work than older mothers. This is particularly the case for single mothers. If early motherhood is associated with diminished employment opportunities over the longer term, it may be beneficial for countries in which this pattern holds to develop policies to support educational or other training opportunities for the youngest single mothers. It is also worth noting that employment levels are relatively similar for all groups aged between 30 and 60, and that part-time employment shows little variance across almost all the age groups.

Figure 8. Employment status by age group for mothers with and without partners



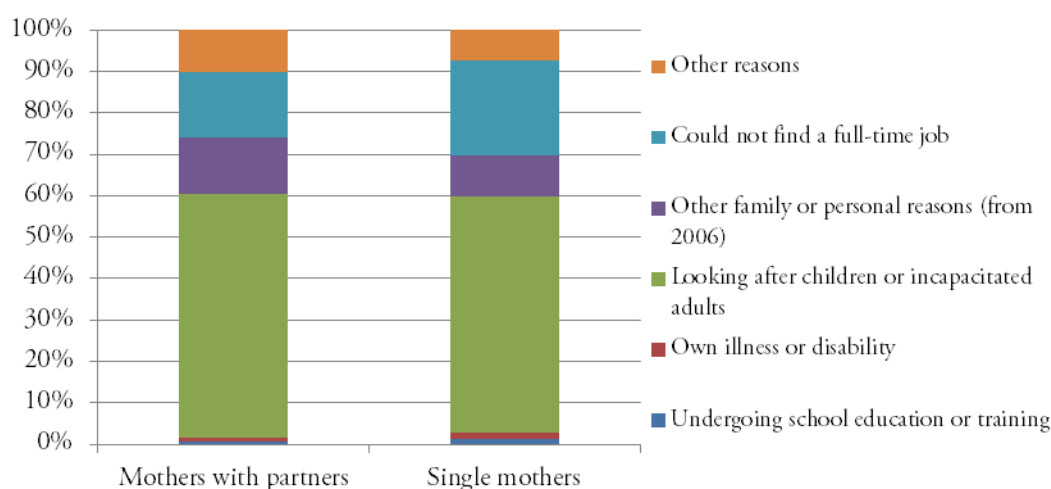
SOURCE: LFS 2010

Figure 9 shows the reasons that mothers work part-time in relation to partner status. Surprisingly, there is relatively little difference between the groups, with the exception of being unable to find full-time work. Without over-interpretation of a single descriptive, this may indicate a burden on single mothers looking for full-time but flexible work which allows them support for childcare (or other benefits relating to childcare). In contrast, single mothers may be less likely to report other family or personal reasons in part because they do not have other family in the household whose needs might impede the mothers' full-time work. Employment issues among parents, particularly single parents, are affected by a combination of the availability of jobs and of childcare and whether and how the two fit together. This combination is also potentially influenced, as previously discussed, by age, education, experience and employers' concerns, meaning that jobs for which they are qualified may be limited, particularly as full-time positions. The extent to which the availability, or working hours, of jobs and childcare is the greatest problem, varies between countries.

Given that the most prevalent barrier to full-time work among mothers is looking after children or incapacitated adults, this problem warrants further investigation. It is unclear, for example, what percentage of mothers are caring for generally healthy children, as opposed to those who are grappling with the more extensive challenges of caring for a child with special needs, or for an adult child or another family member. Previous research shows that single parents of special-needs children or those with other substantial care-giving obligations may face the greatest impediments to employment (Lundberg, 1988; Porterfield 2002). These issues are of concern as policies aimed at addressing the needs of families with generally healthy children would not necessarily address these barriers to employment, particularly among single mothers.

Of potential concern is the almost negligible number of mothers in part-time work in order to further their education, compared to other reasons for not seeking full-time employment. This suggests that these individuals are unlikely to gain competitive and marketable skills through continued education and that they and their households may remain at an increased risk of long-term unemployment and/or underemployment.

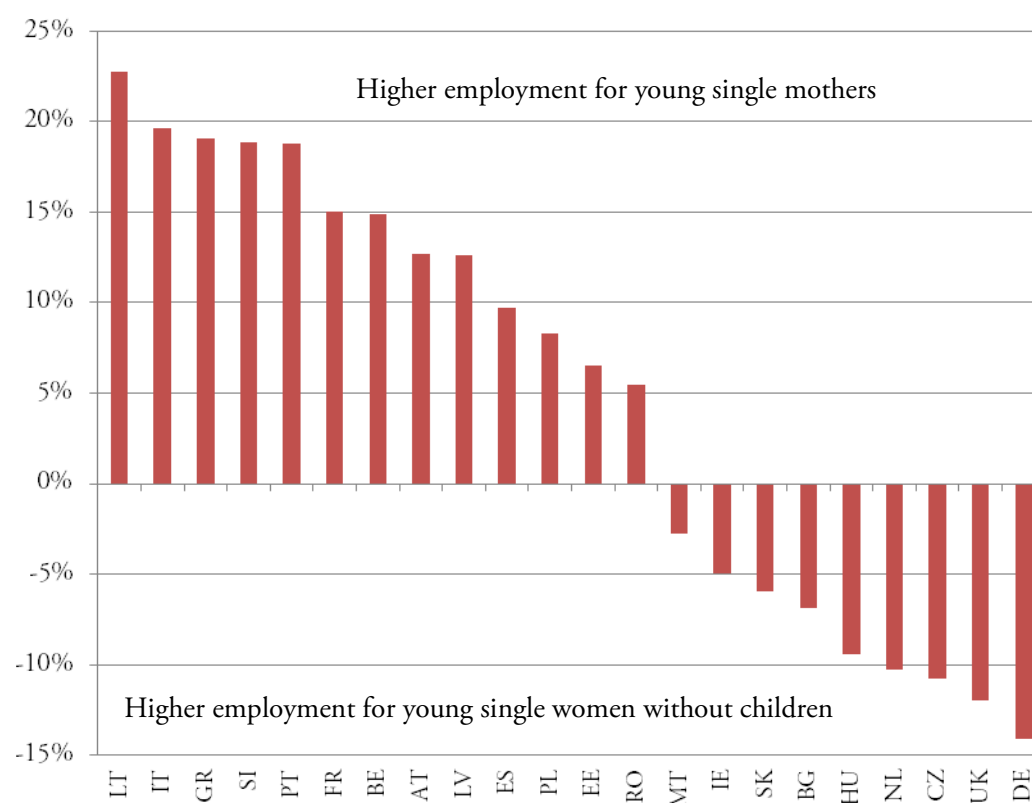
Figure 9. Reasons for part-time work for mothers



SOURCE: LFS 2010

Another concern is the difference in employment for young women with and without children. Figure 10 shows the differences by country in the percentage of single young (15–29 years of age) mothers in employment, compared to women in the same age group without children. In general terms, the higher-income countries tend to show higher employment among younger single women without children, indicating that better social support may exist for young single mothers in those countries which reduces their need/incentive to work. However, it may also indicate a greater income gap in wealthier countries between young single women with and without children, while highlighting low support for those in less wealthy regions. It is important for policymakers to consider the causes of and implications for this, as there may be a variety of reasons related to the availability of benefits, flexible working hours and various other policies supporting families where a single parent works.

Figure 10. Differences in employment between single young women with and without children¹⁰



SOURCE: LFS 2010

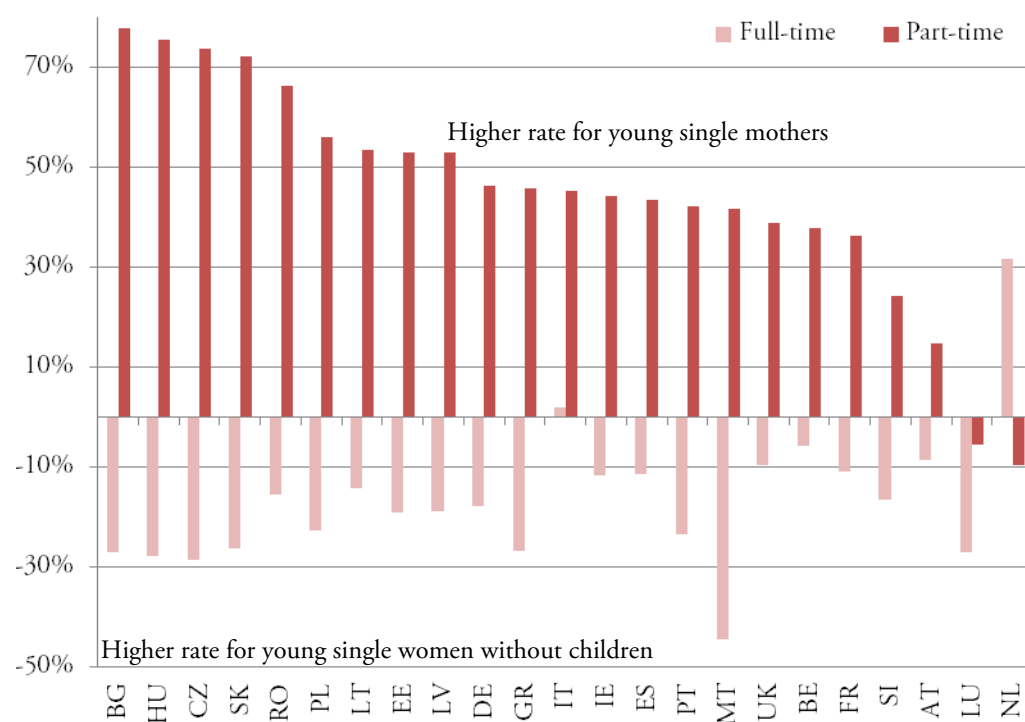
While the above shows both clear differences and substantial variation between nations in the overall employment of young single women with and without children, Figure 11 adds more context by demonstrating that across Europe, young single mothers are also far more likely to work part-time than young single women without children. With few exceptions, young single mothers are also less likely to have full-time jobs. In France, for example, employment is 15.1 per cent higher among young single mothers than young single women without children, but they are 36.3 per cent more likely to be

¹⁰ Luxembourg was excluded from this figure due to the negligible population size for this analysis.

employed part-time, and 10.9 per cent less likely to be employed full-time. In contrast, in the Netherlands, single women with children are 10.3 per cent less likely to be employed, compared to young single women without children. However, the young mothers in the Netherlands are also 31.6 per cent more likely to be employed full-time and 10.3 per cent less likely to be employed part-time than young single women without children. Unemployed women are also included in these totals.

As before, considerations for policymakers must focus on the reasons for, and implications of, these employment patterns. Although a range of family-friendly policies exists across Europe, their direct and indirect effects will vary depending on when they were implemented in other countries, due to contextual differences. Thus, a more in-depth analysis would be needed to assess the cause and effect of economic and non-economic factors, in order to project the potential gains from implementing or expanding specific policies. Likewise, it should also be considered to what extent these differences in employment are related to the limited opportunities for young single mothers to engage in education, compared to young single women without children. Also at risk are the differences in employment and occupational status between groups, with such differences likely to lead to income gaps for single mothers and their children.

Figure 11. Differences in part-time and full-time employment between single young women with and without children



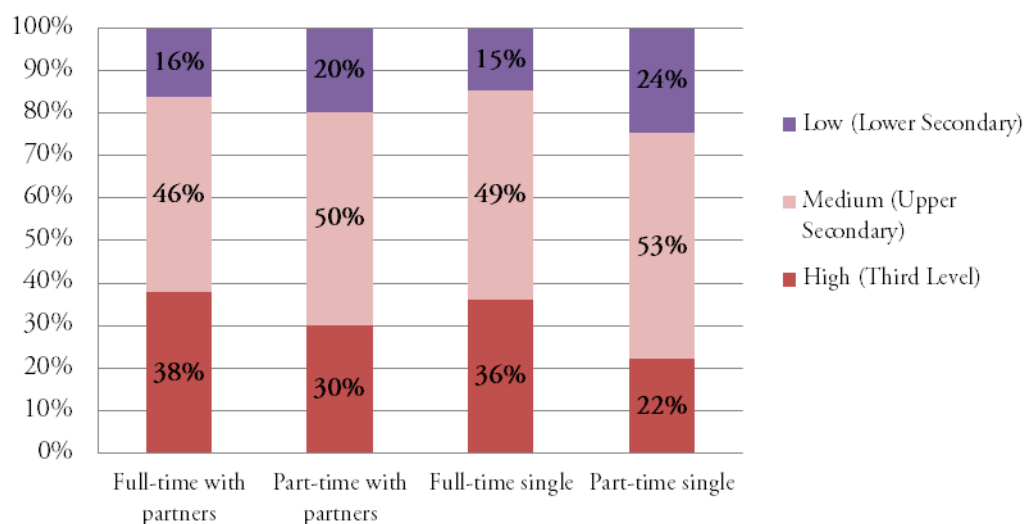
SOURCE: IFS 2010

3.2. Educational differences between single mothers and mothers with partners

Figure 12 shows the educational attainment of single mothers and mothers with partners in relation to whether they are employed full or part-time. Among employed mothers, educational attainment is lower

for single mothers and for those working part-time, with the lowest levels among single mothers who are employed part-time. This pattern¹¹ may contribute to differential labour force opportunities both while acting as a single parent and after the children leave the home.

Figure 12. Education levels for mothers by partner and employment status



SOURCE: LFS 2010

3.3. Occupational differences between single mothers and mothers with partners

Figure 13 shows the differences in occupation of mothers in relation to their partner and employment status. We observe that single mothers who are employed part-time are much less likely to be professionals and are much more likely to be in elementary occupations or to be in service or sales jobs, compared to all other groups of mothers. This pattern is consistent with the differences in education observed above, suggesting that a higher percentage of single mothers lack skills which might qualify them for higher-salaried positions.

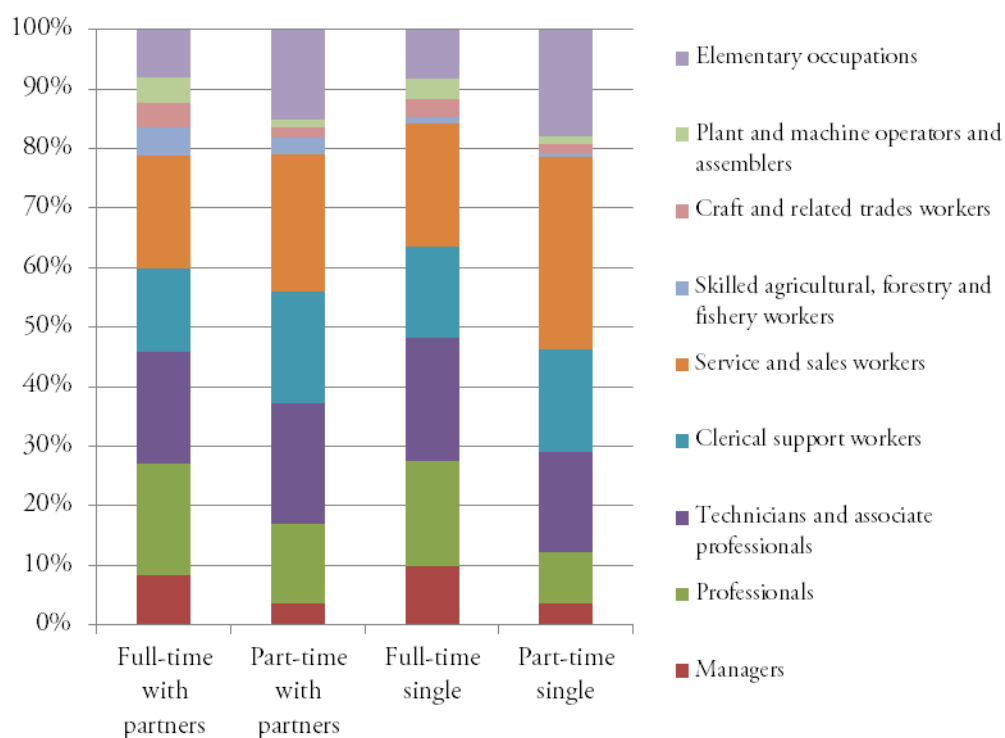
This may mean that a policy consideration around education for single working mothers should be offered in such a way that supports employers to allow those with training needs time off to undertake it. However, mothers in occupations such as services and sales may need the opportunity to make a considerable investment in their education and skills in order to move in to significantly higher-paid work.

In many countries, professional and other highly-paid occupations may place significant demands on work hours which single parents are unable to fulfil given household responsibilities and the availability of childcare and afterschool care. This may imply that policies are needed to ensure that single mothers can request some flexibility in their working positions. If full-time, professional work is seen in some countries

¹¹ For this figure, specific results have been embedded into the table to present actual differences in the pattern.

as incompatible with motherhood, this may discourage young women from pursuing the education and other early career investments necessary to engage in professional careers or other well-paid and highly-skilled occupations (Reskin & Roos 1990). Such a pattern would reinforce both gender inequality and disadvantage in single-mother households.

Figure 13. Occupation type for mothers by partner and employment status

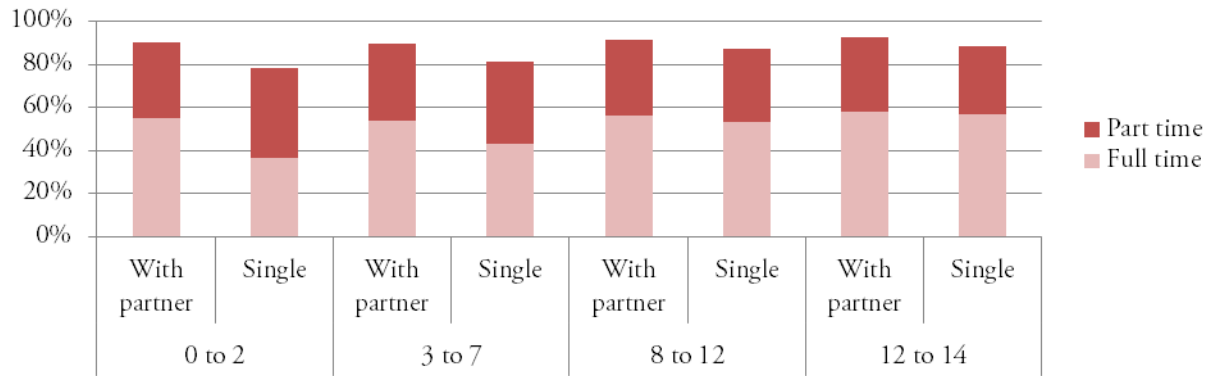


SOURCE: LFS 2010

3.4. The impact of children’s ages on mothers’ employment

As shown in Figure 14, maternal employment rates and status also vary considerably according to the age of the youngest child. However, the variation is greater for single mothers than for those with a partner. Although single mothers are less likely than mothers with a partner to be employed full-time, the difference narrows for those whose youngest child is older, suggesting that having pre-school or younger children presents the greatest barrier to full-time employment. As stated above, policy considerations may require special focus on young mothers with young children to address these issues.

Figure 14. Mothers' employment rates by age of youngest child



SOURCE: LFS 2010

4. Conclusions and policy implications

Over the past decades the proportion of single parent households has increased in the EU (Andersson, 2002; Unicef 2007). This is of particular interest to policymakers, as single parents are considered to be a major risk group for living in poverty (van Stolck et al, 2011; European Commission 2007). This paper has shown that younger mothers and mothers with young children are the least employed parent group, and this is exacerbated for single mothers.

Across Europe, 10.4 per cent of households with children are headed by single parents, ranging from 3.5 per cent (Romania) to 20.4 per cent (UK). Across the 24 countries under study, only 1.2 per cent of homes with children are single-father households. In addition, 81.9 per cent of children live in a household with both their parents, ranging from 63.3 per cent (Belgium) to 94 per cent (Greece). Across Europe, 16 per cent of children come from single-mother homes (ranging from 5.3 per cent in Greece to 28.1 per cent in the UK), while 2.1 per cent (0.7 per cent in Cyprus; 15.1 per cent in Belgium) of children come from single-father homes. Easier conditions for divorce combined with strengthened legal protection against domestic violence are likely to have increased the prevalence of single parenthood in countries where such changes have occurred, particularly the UK. In explaining the uneven spread of single-parent families, some research points to economic factors including men's and women's wages combined with non-economic factors including changing gender roles, attitudes and social norms, as well as legalisation and the availability of reliable contraception and abortion (Ellwood & Jencks, 2004; McLanahan, 2004).

Across the majority of countries, mothers with partners have noticeably higher rates of participation in the labour force compared to single mothers, which may contribute to an increasing socio-economic gap between single parents and those with partners. With few exceptions (namely Luxembourg and the Netherlands), younger single mothers are also less likely to have full-time jobs. In France, for example, employment is 15.1 per cent higher among young single mothers than young single women without children, and the single mothers are 36.3 per cent more likely to be employed part-time and 10.9 per cent less likely to be employed full-time.

In addition, single mothers who are employed part-time are much less likely to be professionals and much more likely to be in elementary occupations, or to work in services and sales, compared to all other groups of mothers. This suggests that a higher percentage of single mothers lack the skills that might qualify them for higher-salaried positions. In many countries, professional and other highly-paid occupations may place significant demands on work hours which single parents are unable to fulfil given household responsibilities and the availability of childcare and afterschool care. This may imply that policies are needed to ensure that single mothers have the opportunity to request some flexibility in their employment

conditions. If full-time professional work is seen in some countries as incompatible with motherhood, this may discourage young women from pursuing the education and other early career investments necessary to engage in professional careers or other well-paid and highly-skilled occupations. Such a pattern would reinforce both gender inequality and disadvantage in single-mother households.

Further work is needed to better understand the barriers to full-time employment among mothers, and whether mothers in general, and single mothers in particular, also experience barriers to part-time employment. Additional research should also examine the extent to which mothers' employment is limited by the availability of full-time jobs, the availability of full-time childcare, or a mismatch between work hours and available childcare hours. Of particular concern is to what extent single parents are limited in their employment opportunities because they are caring for a child with special needs or another family member. In the case of special-needs children, policies aimed at the general provision of childcare or after-school care may be insufficient to address the complex needs of the child. Without a clearer understanding of the types of care-giving that mothers are reporting as a barrier to full-time employment, it is not possible to assess to what extent general versus more specialised policies or benefits would be required to support these households over time. It is also unclear to what extent perceived barriers to combining employment and motherhood are affecting educational attainment and occupational choices. The impact of perceived barriers to combining higher-paid work with parenthood may lead some women to forgo either parenthood or the human capital investments that would enable them to support themselves and their children in the event of becoming single parents. The perceptions and consequences of such barriers tend to differ cross-nationally and may contribute to the risk of poverty in single-mother households.

Additional research is also needed to understand the experiences and needs of single-father households. Equally, it is important to assess whether single fathers are (at least in some countries) more often jointly raising children along with their former partner who is also reporting themselves as a single parent. These should be disaggregated to avoid double-counting single-parent children as well as to distinguish between those raised solely or primarily by one parent. Due to the small number of single fathers relative to single mothers, a concerted effort would need to be made to oversample fathers and to examine the variation in the circumstances under which they become single fathers and how that impacts on their households and children's lives. A better understanding of the demographics and arrangements of single-father households and whether there is an emerging trend towards parenting children in two homes is necessary in order to assess both the needs of these families and whether current policies recognise and address those needs. Provision of public childcare should provide this risk group with a major lever to participate in gainful employment and to increase the number of hours of paid work.

Given the growing number and proportion of single-parent households and children being raised in single-parent homes, the analyses presented here suggest a need for the collection and analysis of more in-depth data on these households and their employment patterns and barriers to employment. While gaps in confirming this exist, some of the above results may suggest that the programmes and policies that have served households with children in the past may not be sufficient to adequately address the needs of single-parent households in general. This may also be the case for those with special-needs children in particular. Moreover, as marriage rates have declined and divorce rates increased, a growing number and proportion of children are likely to spend at least part of their childhood in a single-parent home which

may in turn affect their own expectations of household formation and parenthood, as well as their educational and employment trajectories. This is a critical point as it has already been demonstrated that across the EU, children in single-parent homes are at a greater risk of poverty as well as more likely to suffer material deprivation (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012). Policies will need to be in place to address both increasing prevalence, and in some countries increasing needs. Further research would help to understand better whether social transfers may at least reduce poverty levels for children. Even if it has little impact on material deprivation, ensuring that the poverty gap does not widen when increases in the number or prevalence of single-parent children are observed is critical.

4.1. Limitations

One key aspect missing in this analysis is the specific use of income measures. The opportunities to do this within LFS are limited and it was therefore decided not to include such analysis in this study. Further detail on the specific implications regarding income in future research could make use of the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and could be used to complement the preceding report.

Other potential studies to account for gaps in the information provided here might include seeking additional data to examine the socio-economic status of single parents. This would be supplemented by discovering the proportion of single parents (and their children) living below the poverty line, before and after taking into account child benefit payments and policies. The percentage of single vs. partnered parents relying on state-provided or subsidised childcare for pre-school and younger children would also be of interest and likely to vary between nations.

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