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Support to lone parents

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List of Abbreviations

AAH – Allowance for adults with disability (*allocation aux adultes handicapés*)

AGEPI – Childcare support for lone parents (*aide à la garde d'enfant pour les parents isolés*)

ALF – Family housing allowance (*allocation logement à caractère familial*)

ARS – School allowance (*allocation de rentrée scolaire*)

ASF – Family support allowance (*allocation de soutien familial*)

ASS – Specific solidarity allowance (*allocation de solidarité spécifique*)

API – Lone parent allowance (*allocation de parent isolé*)

CAF – Family allowance fund (*caisse d'allocations familiales*)

CF – Family supplement (*complément familial*)

CNAF – National family allowance fund (*caisse nationale des allocations familiales*)

Drees – Directorate for Research, Studies, Evaluations and Statistics (*direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques*)

GIPA – Maintenance payment guarantee (*garantie contre les impayés de pension alimentaire*)

INSEE – National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (*institut national de la statistique et des études économiques*)

MIG – Minimum income guarantees

MIS – Minimum income schemes

MSA – Agricultural social mutual fund (*mutualité sociale agricole*)

ONPES – National Observatory on Poverty (*observatoire national de la pauvreté et de l'exclusion sociale*)

PPE – Premium for employment (*prime pour l'emploi*)

RMI – Minimum integration income (*revenu minimum d'insertion*)

RSA – Active solidarity income (*revenu de solidarité active*)

Support to lone parents in France

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Introduction

The share of one-parent families in French households has continuously increased so as to represent in 2011 20 % of the families with at least one child below the age of 18¹. In most cases (85 %), the head of the family is a woman.ⁱ Among single parents, 40 % do not receive any alimony pension. During the recession, the economic situation of single parent households, already overexposed to poverty and precariousness, has worsened. According to the INSEE, the individual poverty rate of one-parent families² has increased from 30 % in 2006 to 33.6 % in 2012 (vs. from 13.4 % to 13.9 % for all households). The economic situation of one-parent families was already deteriorating prior to the recession, while slightly improving for other households. Their relative position in the labour market has also weakened: in the 1990's single mothers were more liable to be employed than mothers in couple; the situation has reversed in 2012.ⁱⁱ Such adverse long term trends invite to question the support to lone parents in France: has it eroded in the past 15 years?

One-parent families are diverse as to their origin (divorce, separation, death, birth outside of a couple) and economic situation (poor or precarious, medium or good social position). The role of the other parent (sharing educational responsibilities, paying an alimony pension, no role at all) is also diverse so that the burden of raising children alone is more or less constraining. We will here speak about "lone parents" to designate poor or precarious single parents who do not benefit from sufficient (if any) support from the other parent and are a target of social and employment policies. This term reflects the administrative term of "*parent isolé*" generally used to name them. One-parent families instead will refer to the notion of "*famille monoparentale*" that covers the whole set and diversity of these families.

The French social protection system diversely takes the specific situation of single parents into account and is rather generous and supportive towards lone parents when compared to several neighbour countries. French policies to support lone parents have however radically changed in the long run. In the 1970's, "maternalist" policies aimed at providing poor lone-parents with a minimum income guarantee (MIG) taking the form of a "maternal wage" deemed sufficient to temporarily exempt them from the obligation to work. In the 1990's, promoting the "activation" of the non-employed, i.e. their integration into employment, became a priority. Since lone parents are mothers in their majority, their enrolment in activation policies is illustrative of a shift in the conception of mother's social role: from maternal assignation to integration into employment.ⁱⁱⁱ

This discussion paper will first explore policies to support lone parents (1) and the result of recent reforms (2) before to analyse their strengths and weaknesses (3) and the main questions and issues (4).

¹ It corresponds to 1.6 million one-parent families with 2.4 million children.

² Poverty threshold at 60 % of the median income.

1. Policies to support lone parents

Policies to support lone parents mainly rely on income support schemes since the late 1970's. Only few other measures are dedicated to single parents. Their major shift is from “maternalism” to “activation”. This section will first recall the background and general policy context (1.1.) and the main goals and target groups (1.2.). It will then describe the legal and financial provisions (1.3.) and the institutional arrangements (1.4.).

1.1. Background and general policy context

French policies to support lone parents date back to the 1970's and the creation of the Lone parent allowance API (*Allocation de parent isolé*). The Minimum integration income RMI (*Revenu minimum d'insertion*) created in 1989 also benefited many lone-parents who were not (or no more) entitled to the API. Since the 1990's, minimum income schemes (MISs) suffered a loss of legitimacy: minimum income guarantees (MIGs) turned out to be insufficient to lift their recipients out of poverty and became increasingly suspected of trapping them into inactivity.

The Lone-parent allowance API: a “maternal wage”

The Lone parent allowance API has been created in July 1976, at a time when there was a growing public awareness of new forms of poverty due to family precariousness.^{iv} To face the overexposure of lone-parents to poverty, two minimum income guarantee (MIG) formulas have been implemented: the “long API” from pregnancy to the third birthday of the child and the “short API” for one year following a family break up or the decease of the other parent.

The API was at first thought as a kind of “maternal wage”^v, temporarily exempting eligible lone parents (nearly always mothers) from the obligation to work, in order to allow them to care for their child/ren (and play the role they were socially expected to play as mothers). The original amount of the API (1,390 francs in 1977) reflected this conception: it was quite generous, a little higher than the net full-time minimum-wage (1,380 francs). Policy-makers greatest concern was not that the API could prevent lone parents from returning to employment, but that this allowance could become a substitute for family solidarity and give the other parent incentives to avoid paying the alimony pension (and playing the role socially expected from a breadwinner father). Subsidiarity was thus reasserted by the legislator as a way to uphold the maintenance obligations.

API recipients diversely used the allowance. For some of them, it was a way to find a social status and identity as a mother, for others it was facilitating job search in order to ensure their economic independence.^{vi} More than 40 % of them received the API for less than four quarters and near to 65 % ceased to ask for it before the end of their entitlements, mostly because they lived with a new partner or had a job paid above the administrative poverty threshold.^{vii}

The role of the Minimum integration income RMI for lone parents

The Minimum integration income RMI implemented in 1989 also played an important role in supporting lone mothers who were not (or no more) entitled to the API. Until 2008, one-parent families represented about one quarter of all recipient households.

The RMI was dedicated to poor households hit by unemployment or job precariousness; it was not intended to exempt its recipients from the obligation to

work. Their social and occupational integration was explicitly mentioned as a social duty: “the social and occupational integration of people experiencing difficulties constitutes a national imperative” (law n° 88-1088 of 1st December 1988 establishing the RMI).

The RMI was a means-tested differential allowance for adults above the age of 25 (and parents below 25), completing the household's resources up to a MIG depending on its composition. It was 2,000 francs for a single person household in 1989, about half of the net minimum wage for a full-time job, thus far from full-time wage for the non-employed. The RMI included an incentive scheme allowing recipients who find a job to temporarily combine their activity income with the MIG, and an “integration contract” aiming to support their social and occupational integration. Institutionally, the state was responsible (until 2003) for the financing of the allowance paid by local Family funds (*Caisses d'allocations familiales*), while integration contracts were implemented by social workers under the responsibility of territorial authorities (*Départements*).

Income support, a contested legitimacy

The idea that MISs were discouraging job search and trapping their recipients into poverty gradually developed in the 1990's. It first concerned RMI recipients but gradually extended to API recipients, challenging the very idea of a maternal wage for lone mothers.

As soon as it was created, the RMI raised debates as regards the control of recipient's integration behaviour and the implementation of the integration contract.^{viii} Various surveys, such as the “Exiting RMI” survey in 1998^{ix} or the Insee survey in 2003,^x have shown that the labour market integration of RMI recipients was disappointing. Evaluations also revealed that local integration policies were uneven: while some *Départements* were very active, others had only formally implemented the integration contracts or had no local integration strategy at all.^{xi} After a few years of implementation in times of massive unemployment, (re-) integration into employment had remained the Achilles' heel of the RMI scheme.

A new concern became widespread in the late 1990's: were MISs (especially the RMI and the API) discouraging job-search? This concern was obviously based on a misdiagnosis, because only weak disincentive effects have been reported in the literature: the low rate of return to employment was due to other causes and primarily to the insufficient overall demand for labour.^{xii}

1.2. Goals and target groups

As a consequence of the contested legitimacy of the API and the RMI, the 2009 reform of solidarity instituting the Active solidarity income RSA (*Revenu de solidarité active*) aimed at activating MIGs recipients, calling upon their individual responsibility to go back to work. By merging the API and the RMI in the RSA, the reform clearly enrolled lone parents, suggesting that, like RMI recipients, they have to be encouraged to work through economic incentives and social or job-search support.

Academics and policy makers played a role in the promotion of the RSA. Mainstream micro-economists and macro-economists ceased to think MIGs as redistributive tools and came to consider the reform as an opportunity to fuel the labour market with a flexible labour force. On the supply-side of the labour market, a reform was seen as a way to design relevant economic incentives “making (every

hour of) work pay” or to eliminate existing disincentives and threshold effects deemed to “trap” MIGs recipients outside the labour market.^{xiii} On the demand side, the extension of MIG to the working poor was seen as a way to allow for the containment of the minimum wage’s growth,^{xiv} turning the MIG into an employment subsidy for precarious workers who accept poor quality jobs, including lone-parents.

Martin Hirsch, the High Commissioner for active solidarities, presented the reform as reflecting a paradigm shift liable to boost the employment rate of RSA recipients and to fight their poverty. The reform rather constitutes the culmination of a long activation process that came to include even lone parents. First, incentive mechanisms had already been reinforced for RMI recipients and introduced for API recipients. Second, a tax credit has been created in 2001, the Premium for employment (*Prime pour l’emploi*, PPE) aiming to reward low-wage workers. Third, the RMI had been reformed in 2003 to reinforce decentralised integration policies and to develop dedicated subsidised employment contracts.

1.3. The legal and financial provisions

The RSA and the Higher rate RSA are the most important financial provision to support lone-parents. They insert in a social protection system that take the household’s structure and resources into account. They are completed with family or social provision that either aim at ensuring the subsidiarity principle (i.e. that the other parent complies with his alimony duties) or at favouring the (re-)integration into employment.

The (Higher-Rate) Active Solidarity Income

The RSA has merged and replaced the API and the RMI in June 2009. It aims at making work pay for both MIG recipients and working poor (who were not a target of the RMI and the API). The RSA has two components. The basic RSA or “RSA socle” (*RSA socle*) is a means-tested differential allowance (like the RMI) that completes households’ resources up to a MIG depending on the composition of the household. The “RSA activity” (*RSA activité*) is a new incentive and reward scheme dedicated not only to “RSA socle” recipients who find a job but to every eligible working poor. Contrary to the temporary incentive mechanism of the RMI and the API, the “RSA activity” is not limited in time. The RSA formula is as follows:

$$\text{RSA} = \text{MIG} + 62 \% \text{ of the household's activity income} - (\text{other household's resources} + \text{housing package})$$

Note that as soon as in January 2016, the RSA activity and the Employment premium will be merged and replaced with an Activity premium. This measure intended to be at constant cost might lead to significant reduction in public expenditure. The Activity premium is not a tax credit benefitting to a wide range of taxpayers (as the Employment premium is) but a social allowance (like the RSA activity), with a presumably high non take-up rate.

Since September 2015, the amount of the RSA for a single person without any activity income is EUR 524, which is significantly less than half the net monthly minimum wage for a full-time job (EUR 1,137). The RSA is not a wage for the non-employed, but rather a low leaving income intended to push its recipients back to the labour market. It is assorted with work incentives and rewards as well as with systematic job-search or social integration support for RSA socle recipients.

One-parent families previously entitled to the API are now entitled to a so-called Higher-rate active solidarity income (*RSA majoré*). Like for the API before, the increment is granted to lone parents looking after their child/ren below the age of three. It begins in the month following the notification of pregnancy and stops at the third birthday of the last child. In case of separation or death of the other parent, it applies when children are older but for a limited duration of 12 months. Since September 2015, the Higher rate RSA is EUR 673 for a pregnant woman, EUR 897 for a lone mother of one child, EUR 1,121 for a lone mother with two children (and EUR 224 more per additional child). For a lone-parent with one child it is slightly below the monthly minimum wage for a full-time job (about EUR 1,137).

Other family entitlements

One-parent families benefit from various social entitlements in the French national tax and social security system.

First, in the joint-taxation system built on a male-breadwinner model, single parents benefit from a reduced taxation rate: their family quotient is increased by a half portion (it is even increased by one portion for widows). Second, several social entitlements take the situation of single parents into account. It is not the case of Family allowances (*allocations familiales*) that focus on the number of children. But the Family supplement (*Complément familial*) for those with at least three children aged 3-21, sets income thresholds relying on both the family and employment situations (same threshold for single parents and dual-earners couples while lower for one-earner couples). Similarly, the school allowance (*Allocation de rentrée scolaire, ARS*) and the Handicapped child education allowance (*Allocation d'éducation de l'enfant handicapé*) rates are higher for single parents.

The Family support allowance ASF (*Allocation de soutien familial*), created in 1984³ and reformed in 2008 is the only entitlements dedicated to single parents. It is generally paid by the Family Allowance Fund CAF (*Caisses d'allocations familiales*) to those raising a child without the support of the other parent. The entitlement is permanent when the child has not been legally recognised by one parent (generally the father) or is an orphan who has lost one parent. It lasts only four months when the other parent does not comply with its alimony obligation and pay his or her contribution to the maintenance of child/ren for at least two subsequent months. During that period, the claimant parent has to initiate a legal procedure in order to define (or redefine) a legal alimony pension. If the defaulting parent cannot (or voluntarily refuses to) pay the alimony pension, the CAF may compensate for it. The amount of the ASF is 100 Euros per child for a single parent in 2015⁴. In 2014, 745,000 households benefitted from the ASF.

An 18-months experiment of a new Maintenance payment guarantee, GIPA (*Garantie contre les impayés de pension alimentaire*) has been provided by the law of 4 August 2014 for real equality between women and men. It has been launched on October 2014 in 20 local districts to support single mothers who do not (or barely) receive their alimony pension.

³ It replaced the Orphan allowance created in 1970.

⁴ Note that the ASF also benefits to parents (whether living alone or in couple) taking in a child without the support of his or her parents; its amount in that case is higher, 113 Euros.

Family entitlements have been reformatted so as to reduce their budgetary cost: cuts mainly focus on wealthy families⁵ while part of the savings is reallocated towards poor and modest households.^{xv} Family entitlements and the RSA have notably increased for one-parent families⁶.

Like all families, one-parent families can benefit from a childcare allowance for their child/ren aged below three to help them to pay for childcare services (childminders, crèches, etc.). Like all other families, they pay collective childcare services like crèches according to their resources and number of children. Local policies also grant support to one-parent families, such as support and priority access to social housing or childcare services or preferential tariffs (in school canteens or leisure activities).

Other reintegration measures

In France, national active labour market policies are neither nor explicitly targeted at women. One (marginal) measure standing as an exception is dedicated to single parents: the Childcare support for lone parents, AGEPI (*Aide à la garde d'enfant pour les parents isolés*). It addresses to lone parents of one or more children below the age of 10 who are registered jobseekers. The allowance is paid by the National employment agency *Pôle emploi* to help them resume their professional work or undertake training. It is a lump-sum, the amount of which (from EUR 170 to EUR 520, depending on working hours and the number and age of children) is a one-off payment.

The diversity and development of childcare services in France makes it easier to meet the needs of single parents than in many other neighbour countries. The variety of formal child-care services (crèches, family crèches, day care centres, micro-crèches, registered childminders, etc.) offers relatively flexible solutions. It also facilitates the development of local initiatives and the cooperation of public employment services and municipalities in charge with childcare. The National family fund has developed an information system (www.mon-enfant.fr) managed by local Family funds that aims to present existing childcare facilities and to help parents to find their way at the local level.

1.4. Institutional arrangements and procedures of implementation

From an institutional point of view, the (Higher rate) RSA socle is financed at the territorial level by the *Départements* also in charge with the organisations of integration policies for (Higher rate) RSA socle recipients. The state only finances the RSA activity.

The *Départements* finance RSA socle expenditures through a dedicated tax on energy. This financing revealed problematic during the recession: while RSA socle recipients were becoming more and more numerous, the pro-cyclical revenues from this tax decreased, creating deficits. Since the decentralisation of 2014, *Départements* have been given the “leadership” on integration policies. But their

⁵ For instance: reduction of the family quotient's threshold, introduction of income thresholds for Family allowances.

⁶ (Higher rate) RSA socle: + 2 % on 1 September 2015; ASF: + 25 % between 2013 and 2017.

leadership is limited because they only have social competencies and must rely on local partnerships with *Pôle emploi* or other employment operators on matters to do with job-search support, or with the Local family funds on matters to do with support to families, especially to lone-parent families.

The National family fund CNAF (*Caisse nationale des allocations familiales*) administrates family entitlements at the national level while local Family funds CAF are the benefit paying agencies. They are in charge with family allowances, the RSA and other family entitlements.

Single parents have to address their CAF to benefit from the Family support allowance ASF or the Maintenance payment guarantee, GIPA (in CAF where it is experimented). But they have to address to *Pôle emploi* to benefit from the Childcare support for lone parents, AGEPI. It is worth to be noted that the social and occupational integration of lone-parents recipients of the (Higher rate) RSA socle is delegated to the CAF in many *Départements*. In spite of the merging of the API and the RMI within the RSA, lone-parents thus often continue to depend from separate integration policies. This is not neutral, since when compared with *Pôle emploi* where job-search support is provided by employment advisors, the CAF are rather specialised in social integration support delivered by social workers.

2. Results

The French social protection system significantly contributes to the reduction of poverty rates after social transfers. It contributes to reduce one-parent families' exposure to poverty. However, existing assessments of the measures dedicated to lone parents show disappointing results. This section will explore key results of existing support to lone parents (2.1) and the encountered challenges, obstacles and constraints (2.2).

2.1. Key results

The disappointing outcomes of the (Higher rate) RSA

The RSA had raised high expectations before its generalisation in June 2009. It had been experimented in 34 *Départements* and a political use of provisional results had led to triumphant declarations suggesting a spectacular increase in the recipient's rate of return to employment, estimated superior by 30 % in test zones vs. control zones. The weaknesses of these results were not mentioned: the rate of return to employment was only 2.92 % in RSA zones vs. 2.25 % in RMI zones, making the difference trifling in absolute terms, smaller than the margin of error.

According to the report of the National RSA evaluation committee,^{xvi} the outcomes of the RSA have been extremely disappointing. The report showed that, after two years of implementation, the RSA has had no global impact on the recipient's rate of return to employment. RSA recipients who have (or find) a job still had a poor quality (part-time, short-termed, low-wage) job. The RSA has had a very small impact on poverty: the estimated reduction in the share of low income households was 0.2 % in 2010, while the poverty rate had diminished by 0.2 p.p. and the number of poor by 2 % (-150,000). Many households who would have qualified for the RSA did not ask for the allowance so that the non-take-up rate was high. Only 1 on 2 eligible households has asked for the RSA: the non-take-up rate of the RSA socle was 36 % (as for the RMI before) but rose up to 68 % for the RSA activity that largely missed its new target (the working poor).. The report concluded that with some more time

and information, further evaluations should find an improved efficiency of the RSA. Two years later, it is clear that these soft conclusions have been too optimistic.^{xvii}

The outcomes of the RSA for lone parents are mitigated. The rate of return to employment has increased for lone-mothers recipients of the Higher rate RSA when compared with the recipients of the API⁷. This upward trend was however already observed before the implementation of the RSA,^{xviii} A study of the trajectories of lone-mothers recipients of the RSA socle or the Higher rate RSA socle however showed that, despite this increase in their employment rate, most of them remained out of employment between November 2007 (19 months before the reform) and December 2010 (19 months after the reform), reflecting the various barriers they faced when trying to return to employment.^{xix}

Insufficient reintegration and family support measures

Reintegration measures remain insufficient to overcome the barriers that many single parents face to maintain or return to employment. The AGEPI aims to prevent childcare from being an obstacle to occupational reintegration but its total amount (a one-off payment of EUR 170 to EUR 520 per year) is much below the cost of childcare: on average single parents pay EUR 143 per month (vs. EUR 198 for couples) once tax credits and allowances are taken into account.^{xx}

The fiscal system and several social entitlements consider the specific situation of single parents but not sufficiently to compensate for the cost of raising children alone. The only dedicated entitlement, the ASF paid to single parents raising a child without the support of the other parent faces important limits. Its temporary character together with the fact that recipients have to initiate a legal procedure against the other parent to be supported by the CAF leads to a very high non take-up rate.^{xxi}

The recent upgrading of the RSA and other family entitlements is expected to improve the relative situation of single-parent households.^{xxii} While wealthy families will be negatively affected, lone-parent families will represent 52 % of the winners: 40 % of those with one child and 60 % of those with two or more children will earn respectively 42 euros and 83 euros more per month. The impact on their poverty rate will depend on the relative evolution of their total income and remains undocumented.

2.2. Challenges, obstacles and constraints encountered

The main challenges of the activation of lone-parents are the insufficiency of available and affordable childcare or housing facilities together with the insufficient (quality) employment supply. Lone parents often cumulate these obstacles with others related to their individual characteristics such as a low educational level or health troubles.

According to an exploitation of the Drees survey regarding the RSA experimentations from June 2007 to May 2009,^{xxiii} one on four lone parents declared difficulties to read, write or count, more than one on two had no access to the internet or no driving licence. Other obstacles were the cost of childcare,

⁷ It is difficult to precisely assess the impact of the RSA on employment rates: the structure of RSA recipients has changed to include working poor who were not entitled to the RMI or the API before.

transportation costs or health problems, together with the bad quality of available jobs. A qualitative survey regarding local experimentations of jobseekers support for lone parents showed that lone mothers were oriented to the private or social individual service sectors^{xxiv} – home cleaning, home care, school canteens, etc. – where jobs are generally part time and low paid, offering no qualification or career opportunities. The results of RSA evaluations confirm that lone parents returning to employment generally find a part-time and low-paid job.^{xxv}

3. Strengths and weaknesses

3.1. The (Higher rate) RSA

When comparing France with other neighbour countries, the RSA has several interesting features. First, it is a universal (Beveridgian) allowance that completes the gaps of existing Bismarckian social protections. Second, it may be considered innovative both because it has been experimented before its generalisation, and due to the decentralisation of integration policies. Third, it is the culmination of an activation process increasingly promoting the labour market reintegration. The case of lone-parents is illustrative of this process since this category of households was from the late 1970's to the late 1990's temporarily exempted from the obligation to work. Their enrolment in an activation strategy could have met the desire of many lone mothers to participate in employment.

The first weakness of the RSA lies in its design.^{xxvi} The RSA addresses recipients' rationality, but its computation is so complex that many eligible households never ask for it. Some of them do not know if they are eligible or not, others fear to have overpayment to reimburse in case the amount they would receive turns out to be too high once their activity income is taken into account⁵. In terms of gender equality, due to the fact that the eligibility to the RSA depends on the total resources of the households, incentives to work address to households, not to individuals. It provides couples with ambivalent rewards: incentives to work may as well favour a one-earner (male-breadwinner, female homemaker) rather than a dual-earner household. Lone parents are encouraged to work and to accept even low-paid jobs... or to leave in couple. Similarly, social integration and job-search support are dedicated to RSA recipients, so that individuals in couples ceases to qualify for this support as soon as their partner finds a job that pays sufficiently to lift the household out of poverty. Women in couple are particularly concerned, while lone parents are always supported to look for a job...unless they find a partner.

The second weakness of the RSA lies in supply-side policies on the employment front. Active solidarity relies on the belief that refining incentives to work would be sufficient to push MIG recipients into employment. Before the RSA reform, however, various surveys showed that they were already willing to work^{xxvii} but faced with constraints, such as health problems, family responsibilities or a lack of training, especially lone-mothers. First of all, they were suffering from the high unemployment level and from employment precariousness. The third weakness is on the poverty front. In the long run, the gap between the level of MIGs (RMI and API) and the monthly full-time minimum wage has widened. MIGs' have raised much slowly than the median income and the poverty line (60 % of the median income), increasingly exposing their recipients to poverty. The RSA reform did not reverse the trend.

3.2. Other reintegration and family support measures

Dedicated reintegration measures are insufficient, but local social policies may provide for measures explicitly targeted on mothers or lone parents. For instance, in the city of Nantes, the cooperation between the institutions in charge with job-search support (such as *Pôle emploi*) and those in charge with childcare provisions (such as municipalities) aims at providing a general support to the reintegration of parents, and especially lone-parents, into employment. Local experiences are often innovative. But the lack of evaluation prevents from concluding that they perform well. Similarly, the Maintenance payment guarantee, GIPA, experimented in several *Départements* is an innovative measure but its evaluation is not available yet.

The impact of the upgrading of family entitlements is still difficult to assess. It is liable to improve the day-to-day life of many single parents but may provide them for an insufficient compensation to the long-term degradation of their situation.

4. Main questions and issues

The shift in policies to support lone parents, from maternalism to activation, did not lead to a reduction in the exposure of one-parent families to poverty. Instead, their poverty rate has continuously increased since the mid 1990's, while it was stagnating or even slightly decreasing for other households. As a consequence, one of the main issues is now to improve their standard of living (4.1.)... without returning to maternalism (4.2.)

4.1. Improving the relative standard of living of lone parents...

As shown in the 2011-2012 report of the National observatory on poverty ONPES (*Observatoire national de la pauvreté et de l'exclusion sociale*), the standard of living of MIGs for single persons and for lone parents has deteriorated relatively to the median standard of living for a single person. The deterioration is particularly important for the API and the Higher rate RSA between 2004 and 2009. The RSA reform did not significantly upgrade the (Higher rate) RSA socle nor reverse the situation. In France as in other EU countries, activation reforms turned out to be unsuccessful even before the recession of 2007; it revealed more effective in containing the cost of public expenditures than in supporting the social and occupational integration of poor households, especially lone parents.^{xxviii}

4.2. ... Without returning to maternalism

The activation of lone parents has been softer in France than in American *workfare* experiences and continues to temporarily exempt lone parents from the obligation to work.^{xxix} From that point of view, the “farewell to maternalism”^{xxx} is still incomplete even if lone-parent's MIG no more compares with a “maternal wage”. The challenge is thus to turn the “maternal wage” into a citizen's income guarantee combining an upgraded MIG with global integration policies.

Since many low-skilled lone mothers only qualify for bad jobs (low-paid, part-time and atypical-hours jobs) and barely find childcare facilities to answer their need at a reasonable cost, there is a need to facilitate their access to adequate and affordable childcare services and to quality employment. There is a need to implement macroeconomic policies promoting employment in sectors where social needs exist, such as childcare, and to develop dedicated active labour market programmes (training and full-time employment contracts, especially in the public sector).

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End Notes

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