



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Support to lone parents

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## Comments Paper - Romania



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# Support to lone parents in Romania

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## 1. Introduction and relevant country context

### 1.1. Single parent families: evolution and dimension

The share of single parent families in Romania has continuously increased. According to the latest Romanian Census, in 2011 single parent families registered a percentage of 14.0 of total families (21.7 % of the families with at least one child below the age of 18). But the traditional nuclear family still prevails in Romania.

Table 1. Types of Romanian families

	2011		2002		1992	
	Total thousands	%	Total thousands	%	Total thousands	%
<b>Total</b>	5,818.5	100.0	6,369.5	100.0	6,393.1	100.0
<b>Families without children</b>	2,081.1	35.8	2,108.9	33.1	2,065.3	32.3
<b>Families with children</b>	2,925	50.3	3,404	53.4	3,637.5	56.9
<b>Single parent families</b>	812.4	14.0	856.6	13.5	690.3	10.8

Source: Romanian National Statistical Institute (INS) Population and Housing Census, 2011, 2002, 1992

### 1.2. Policy to support lone parents

In recent years, Romania has been shaping a more explicit family policy, meaning that the family support programmes were better targeted to support those families being in difficulty due to the lack of income or low income. A number of programmes has been developed to protect families and children in difficulty in order to reduce poverty in families with children through growth and diversification of family allowances.

The social services for families have reached a significant development and diversification because of the emerging legal framework in the field. However there are still many gaps in the system's organisation and function at local level [1].

In Romania policies to support lone parents mainly rely on income support schemes. In 2004 the *Support allowance for single-parent parents* (OUG 105/ 24.10.2003) was created.

**Table 2. The evolution of *Support allowance for single-parent families*, number of beneficiaries, 2004 – 2010**

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
209,328	247,373	244,845	221,194	189,768	193,958	200,656

Source: Romanian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly

In 2010, the OUG 105/ 24.10.2003 was repealed and the *Support allowance for single-parents* was replaced by *Family allowance* (Low no.277/2010).

This new allowance is based on means-testing and is paid to families with children if the monthly net family income (divided by the number of family members) is lower than a threshold of 1,06 SRI (530 lei, about 120 EUR). The programme is designed to ensure better conditions for the care, education and rising of children and also to stimulate school attendance of children of school age in families who benefit from this allowance.

Since the allowance was related to children's school attendance, a significant number of beneficiaries have lost the right to this allowance.

**Table 3. The evolution of *Family allowance for single-parent families*, number of beneficiaries, 2011 – 2014**

2011	2012	2013	2014
59,172	56,095	52,344	52,000

Source: Romanian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly

According to the present legislation, Family allowance is granted for two types of single parent families:

- Families made of a single person who takes care of his/her children (up to 18 years old) living together and earning net monthly income per family member of up to 200 lei (45 EUR).

	Amount (Lei) 2015	Amount (Euro) 2015
Families with 1 child	107	24.2
Families with 2 children	214	48.5
Families with 3 children	321	72.7
Families with 4 or more children	428	96.9

- Families made of a single person who takes care of his/her children (up to 18 years old) living together and earning net monthly income per family member between 201 lei (45 EUR) and 530 lei (120 EUR).

	Amount (Lei) 2015	Amount (Euro) 2015
Families with 1 child	102	23.1
Families with 2 children	204	46.2
Families with 3 children	304	68.8
Families with 4 or more children	408	92.4

In December 2011 a new Social Assistance law was adopted (Law 292/2011). Under this new law, social assistance benefits are linked to the Social Reference Indicator (SRI) in order to ensure compatibility with unemployment insurance benefits (according to law no. 76/2002 on the unemployment insurance system and stimulation of the employment, including subsequent amendments).

The Law no. 76/2002 on the unemployment insurance system and stimulation of the employment foresees *only one measure to stimulate employment of unemployed single parents*: employers who hire indefinitely unemployed single parents monthly receive for a period of 12 months for each person employed from this category an amount equal to the Social Reference Indicator (SRI), with the obligation of maintaining employment relations at least for 18 months.

Single-parent families also benefit from various social entitlements in the Romanian national social security system (universal financial support or services for families).

### **1.3. Quality of life of single parent families: empirical evidences**

Single-parent families have become an important and permanent feature of many existing societies [2]. The quality of family life is an important indicator for assessing the efficiency of family policies. Lone parents are persons more vulnerable economically and socially compared with other persons. The stability of single parent families is considered more fragile, this type of family being more exposed in times of crisis, when they are losing their jobs easier. The presence of a single salary earning leads to material difficulties.

In 2010, the National Scientific Research Institute for Labour and Social Protection (INCSMPS) conducted a survey<sup>1</sup> on the quality of life in Romanian single parent families. According to this empirical research, more than one third of the investigated lone parents did not have a paid job at the time of the survey, therefore being at great risk of marginalisation. The most exposed to unemployment were *single mothers, parents with low educational levels or those living in rural areas*.

In the case of employed parents, high level of education brings more economic stability, as single parents with high educational levels are having fewer difficulties in keeping the jobs. But even single parents with high educational levels lack the help of the second parent, risking to be affected by the impact of the conflict between work and family, with consequences on their quality of life. Single parents have serious concerns about how to manage their career in a way that minimally affects the relationship with their children and their responsibilities within the family, especially when access to child care services is lacking. Thus, work-life balance, an important indicator on quality of family life, can have problematic aspects without a second parent in the family, especially since the cultural model of the Romanians shows that both men and women should work.

Moreover, the fact that a woman has a job does not have negative effects on children's growth and education, according to the single parents' opinions. What really has a negative impact on children's growth and education in the case of

<sup>1</sup> Survey based on face-to-face questionnaire among carers of single-parent families, nationally representative sample consisting of 855 households, 95 % confidence level, with +/- 5 % sampling error.

working mothers is, as in the case of working fathers, the fact that parents need to work harder in order to compensate the lack of income from the missing parent on the expense of time spent with their children.

The vast majority of single parents depended heavily on incomes obtained from social benefits [3]. Most often mentioned as sources of income through the welfare system were: *state allowance for children*, *family allowance* and *social aid* on ensuring the minimum guaranteed income. Referring to the financial value of incomes obtained by families through the welfare system, most respondents said these revenues helped them very little, little or not at all to rise their children. Despite this fact, respondents admitted that they would not handle rising and educating children without such aids, benefits and state allowances [4].

## 2. Policy debate

Policy debate refers mainly to the challenges of the activation of lone parents. Romania has the highest (persistent) poverty rates across Europe and continues to accumulate multiple disadvantages in education, health, and housing. In addition, labour market distortions determine and maintain high levels of in-work poverty [5]. Lone parents often accumulate a number of obstacles: insufficient employment supply, in-work poverty, lack of affordable childcare provision, health issues.

The risk of poverty may be greater for single parents with younger children and for those who experience a permanent impact on their employability due to a longer period of unemployment. For Romanian lone parents with very young children the impact may be greater, if the level of paid parental leave is lower or if they would have to pay more for full-day childcare programmes.

The use of the European Social Fund to develop complementary or pilot programmes for the activation of lone parents was an important strategy to compensate the few programmes intended for this type of family.

## 3. Transferability aspects

- Cooperation between the institutions in charge of job-search support and those in charge of childcare provisions (good practice from France aims at providing a general support to the reintegration of parents, and especially lone parents, into employment) may lead to a good integration of Romanian lone parents into the labour market.
- The programmes similar to ones implemented in Germany (like “Good work for lone parents” and “Networks of effective assistance for lone parents”) could be financed through the European Social Fund (ESF) in Romania.

## 4. Recommendation and conclusion

Increase the earning of lone parents, helping them to enter work and reduce their dependence on the social benefits could boost life chances for children in those households.

Two main areas need to be urgently addressed in Romania for this type of family:

- (1) ECEC services;
- (2) In-work poverty.

The Romanian Government Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (2014-2020) recognises the precarious condition of childcare services and emphasises the need for increasing support for low-income families (including many single-parent families).

The strategy proposes a community-grounded and integrated approach to basic social services. Also, the strategy emphasises the need to develop an integrated income support scheme (*the minimum insertion income* which will include in the first phase (starting with 2016) only the main targeted benefits (MIG, family allowance and heating aids) and should be developed to unify all targeted benefits, including those on education) alongside with an integrated social assistance service, able to personalise activation strategies.

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